

BLACK FEMINIST THEOLOGY:

A NEW WORD ABOUT GOD

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*This professional project, completed by*

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Dean

DEDICATION

For my parents:

Alvah R. Bynum and Charley A. Bynum  
(who died as he lived, in the service  
of his Lord)

Their word about God has always been:

God is able

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LMB

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## ABSTRACT

The initial aim of this project was to discover ways in which black and feminist theologies of liberation encounter each other. Both of these theologies seek to challenge the assumptions of white and male-dominated, European influenced theologies. Both would have the church reflect the inclusiveness which God intends for humanity. Yet, there has been very little dialogue between the two theologies.

My research has revealed that both black and feminist theologies of liberation are lacking in the way they have dealt with black women. Much has been taken for granted by both sides.

I have attempted to create a responsible synthesis from the creative and prophetic elements found within these two theologies. A black feminist theology of liberation is offered here. Much work needs to be done in the area as we seek God's face in all humanity.



## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

And she had nothing to fall back on: not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality, she may very well have invented herself.<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF DUAL OPPRESSION

The knowledge grows that there is a need for black women to do what no what else can do for them. That is, black women have to tell their own story. The story they tell is a story of desolate reality, yet it is also the story of a reality lived in the faith that they are made strong by the belief that God struggles with them. Therefore, the burden of desolation is not borne alone.

Since my first days at seminary, I have found myself having to define my Christian existence in terms of two struggles which had been viewed as primarily secular. Those struggles are the women's movement and the black movement. Work in these areas was not totally unknown to me, but serious consideration had not been given to them. Exposure to the work of those doing black theology and feminist theology raised an important question: what should be the strategy for attaining the God-given right to freedom from oppressive

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<sup>1</sup>Toni Morrison, in Mary Helen Washington (ed.) Black Eyed-Susans (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), p.vii.

restraints, especially when those who benefit from oppression will usually do nothing to loosen oppression's bonds? At the heart of the issue is the need to find the best way to fight for freedom from the desolate oppression and still remain true to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dual oppression has been mentioned. The problems being discussed deal with a particular kind of oppression. They deal with the kinds of oppression being faced daily by black women. Those black women in predominately white and/or predominately male professions who know what it is to be discounted because of racism and sexism, know that the problems being dealt with are acute ones which cause one to wonder sometimes if whether church leaders have any concern for those who suffer from oppression.

Our largely secular, white/male-dominated society must bear part of the responsibility for the dual oppression of black women. It too often operates out of the mistaken notion that neither blacks (and other non-whites) nor women are to be taken seriously. In fact, by using the white male as the positive standard against which the very humanness of others is measured, a negative self-image on the part of the oppressed will be virtually assured, and negative cultural myths will be internalized.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Letty Russell, "A Feminist Looks at Black Theology" in Calvin E. Bruce and William Jones (eds) Black Theology (Lewisburg: Buckness University Press, 1978), p. 250.

The dual oppression faced by black women is a problem for several reasons. Two personal experiences will illustrate the problem.

1. In 1962, I was at an integrated, church-sponsored children's choir camp. All of the campers were between the ages of eight and twelve years. On the first day of camp, I was standing next to a white boy who was my same age. All of us were anxious as we faced a week away from home, our parents, and our childhood comforts. My anxiety was only heightened as this little boy looked at me and said with all the contempt an eight-year-old could muster: "You Negro". Somehow this boy had gotten the message that his whiteness was superior to my blackness. At that moment in time, both he and I represented the kind of oppressive situation which permeated (and still permeates) the national mood. The United States is a racist nation and religious institutions reflect that racism.

2. In the sixth-grade classroom, there was a great deal of excitement. It was October and the first day of the World Series. The teacher had brought his radio to school so that we could all enjoy the game. While we were listening to the game, one of the boys asked a question about Sandy Koufax's pitching performance during the regular season. Since he had asked the question to no one in particular, I felt quite comfortable answering it. My joy at answering the question correctly was rather quickly truncated by the sarcastic way in which the boy who had asked the question remarked about my

answer, "She thinks she knows about baseball". His point was clear. By answering the question about Sandy Koufax, I had violated his eleven-year-old manhood. I had demonstrated some knowledge in what was purely a male preserve. I had entered the world of sport. Sexism is as pervasive as racism.

Situations have changed somewhat since choir camp and the sixth grade. Still the problems remain.

Sexism and racism are not the same. But they have the same exploitive results and they lead to the same frustrations. In that sense the problems faced by black people and women are similar. Pauli Murray identifies several of the similar problems faced by blacks and women. Both groups face economic and social exploitation, limited access to educational and professional opportunities, under-representation which can lead to dependency and powerlessness, and internalized negative self-images.<sup>3</sup>

It is no secret that the church participates in the kind of situation Murray describes. We have only to remember that the African Methodist Episcopal Church has its beginnings in the racism of the eighteenth century. And late in the twentieth century, women are still having to legitimate their right to professional employment in the church.

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<sup>3</sup>Paul Murray, "Black Theology and Feminist Theology: A Comparative View", Anglican Theological Review, LX (January 1978), 10.

The dual oppression of black women is a problem because continued oppression serves only to deprive the church of much of its potential leadership. Much of traditional Christian theology is written and lived as though theology were the last preserve of white maleness. What those who would protect and maintain the preserve do not realize is that until every aspect of the Church is represented, Christian theology will remain a virtually exclusive, white, male enterprise. Letty Russell says: "Women make a contribution to the unfinished dimension of Christian thought. They want to add to the understanding of the Christian faith, not replace the other insights that have been contributed by others."<sup>4</sup> What she says is also true of blacks.

The dual oppression of black women in theology and in the church is a problem because it is quite simply wrong. Theological circles have neglected the needs of black women. Too much of feminist theology has been dominated by white middle-class women and too much of black theology has been written by black men only.

#### THESIS STATEMENTS

There are two theses which will be explored in this essay. The first thesis serves the introduction and the first

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<sup>4</sup>Russell, p. 251.

chapter. The second thesis serves the remainder of the essay.

The theses are as follows:

Thesis 1: Previous work in the area of black and feminist theology is inadequate to the experiences of black women. At the time of this writing, there has been very little work which deals with the issue of black feminist theology and is written from a black-feminist perspective.

Thesis 2: Freedom through Christ is revolutionary in that it liberates persons in such a way that oppressive restraints for anyone are no longer tolerable. The Christian understanding of freedom can motivate black women, who know at least two kinds of oppressive restraints.

Black women know what it is to live under dehumanizing conditions. Personal strength can often come from having to adjust to life lived in oppressive circumstances. Persons who have learned to endure repeated racist and sexist encounters often learn behavior that is revolutionary. Roy Sano, in a theological address delivered at the Consultation of Ethnic-Minority Women in Ministry, April 21, 1978, asked if non-white women are not called to be subversive in their dealings with racist and sexist structures. He was asking if non-white women are not called to be a perpetual thorn in the side of social, political, and religious institutions, always challenging those institutions toward greater inclusion of all of God's Creation. It is out of an understanding of God's creation that Gustavo Guterrez speaks of the work of Christ in human liberation.

The work of Christ is presented simultaneously as a liberation from sin and its consequences: despoilation, injustice, hatred. This liberation fulfills in an unexpected way the promises of the prophets and creates a new chosen people, which this time includes all humanity. Creation and salvation therefore have a Christological sense: all things have been created in Christ, all things have been saved by him.<sup>5</sup>

#### DEFINITION OF MAJOR TERMS

The following terms will be operational throughout this essay.

**Liberation:** liberation is the process of eliminating the internal and external causes of oppression; it is the process whereby persons beginning to live as individuals who are self-determined human beings can participate in society without having to carry the burden of being oppressed. Theologically, liberation is lived in the knowledge that one is a child of God, and created in the divine image.

**Theology:** the study of God's work with all of creation; it is the "word about God".

**Feminist:** one who believes that gender ought not to serve as a barrier to one's participation in any social, political, or religious endeavor.

**Revolutionary:** a) noun: one who seeks to change existing social, political, and/or religious institutions; b) adjective: the process by which stubborn institutions are often changed.

**Oppression (oppressive situation):** the denial of rights to people for social, racial, political, or religious reasons.

**Sexism:** the belief that one gender is inherently superior to the other and therefore that the superior gender should enjoy rights and privileges that are to be denied to the interior gender; **sexist:** one who believes and/or feels the above and/or acts as if he or she did.

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<sup>5</sup> Gustavo Guitierrez, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 158.

Racist: the belief that one race is inherently superior to the others and therefore that the superior race should enjoy rights and privileges that are to be denied the inferior races. racist: one who believes and/or feels the above and/or acts as if he or she does.

Praxis: theory put into action. For the purpose of this study, praxis may be understood as the dynamic of a working, struggling faith.

#### SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE ESSAY

It is the intent of the essay to construct a theology of liberation from a black feminist perspective. The need for this construction becomes clear when we consider these facts: on the one hand, women are a strong force in the stability of any black congregation. On the other hand, in terms of salaried leadership in those congregations, particularly in the area of professional clergy, women are not even close to being proportionately represented. Also, no theology has been written which specifically speaks to black women.

Pauli Murray, an attorney and the first black woman to be ordained into the Episcopal priesthood, has already been quoted. Hers is the only research in this area completed thus far that has been written by a black woman. She offers a comparative view of the two theologies. She is more in tune with feminist than with black issues and sees feminist theology as the thought form that can unite all oppressed people because one half of all the people in a given racial group are female.



My major concern is not whether feminist theology can lead us to liberation. Nor is my concern to debate whether all oppression and discrimination occur because people want to control the lives of other people because of gender, skin color, or economic circumstances. Such arguments are unproductive because "racism and sexism along with classism", as Letty Russell says, "are manifestations of the same process which both justifies and helps perpetuate the exploitation of one group of human being by another."<sup>6</sup> When oppressed people get stuck on whether one particular kind of oppression preceded all others, it is the oppressor who wins. He or she is victorious because the oppressed have become players in a tragic game of "divide and conquer".

The focus of responsibility in addressing the problem of the dual oppression of black women within theological circles will consist of a comparison of the work of James H. Cone and Rosemary Radford Ruether. These two theologians were selected because they have remained Christian while being very critical of traditional Christianity and because they represent very different points of view in terms of liberation theology. Both are very influential theologians who have written widely.

This essay will not attempt a detailed analysis of liberation theologies. While other writers in the field of liberation theologies will be used as background sources, the

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<sup>6</sup>Russell, p. 248.

major focus of this work remains the ways in which a theology of liberation from a black feminist perspective might be put together.

#### Procedure for the Rest of the Essay

Chapter Two of the essay examines the relationship between the early twentieth-century social gospel and black and feminist theologies. Chapter Three consists of a review and comparison of the work of Ruether and Cone. And Chapter Four is a personal construction of a theology of liberation from a black feminist perspective.

There is included also a simulation game entitled "Merger?" This game offers one way local churches can examine their attitudes concerning racism and sexism.

## CHAPTER TWO

THE AMERICAN SOCIAL GOSPEL, BLACK AND FEMINIST  
THEOLOGIES OF LIBERATION: CHALLENGES TO THE ESTABLISHED ORDER

The movement known as the social gospel offered a religious-social-political critique of the dominant themes in American culture. Theologies of liberation which involve blacks and women also offer religious-social-political critiques of American culture. There is in that sense a relationship between the social gospel and black and feminist theologies of liberation.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a brief examination of the way in which the social gospel relates to black and feminist liberation theologies. As blacks and women press for the rights to equal opportunity in the United States, their issues become more political. Equal opportunity and equal rights both imply the right of equal protection under the law. Political issues inevitably become involved when men and women press for their full civil liberties. The social gospel movement in America was a political movement; and it speaks to the movements of black and feminist liberation theologies.

American social gospel and American liberation theologies will be examined in this chapter. I speak quite intentionally of liberation theologies in the plural. There can be no single liberation theology in the United States because there is no single group in this country which alone

is victimized by oppression. Blacks and other non-whites and women of various socioeconomic and racial background in America know what it is to be denied their full rights as citizens of this country. The need for liberation is very real. Black and feminist theologies belong in the camp of liberation theologies. They are movements toward greater freedom.

The period of activity for the American social gospel has been designated as that period between 1870 and 1920. The movement grew out of the concerns of pastors who were responding to the effects of industrialization on the nation's cities. The American social gospel represents a political movement because it challenged ruling-class "Captains of Industry" who were in disputes with the laborers who had come to the cities to find work. Pastors who were sensitive to the needs of workers sought ways for the church to be involved in the everyday lives of industrial workers and others in the nation's urban areas.

Black theology may be understood as a religious response to the black power movement. Black theology was and is concerned with presenting the "word about God" from a perspective which most clearly speaks to the needs of black people. It relies heavily on the Old Testament stories of God's rescuing faithful people from conditions of oppression. Black theology, especially uses the Exodus story in which God, acting through Moses, freed the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery.

Black theology believes that black persons need to be involved in activity which brings about the recognition by themselves and others of the freedom granted by God. The goal is to be free of racist oppression.

Feminist theology is concerned with the way in which women have been discriminated against throughout and because of Christian history. Feminist Christians share several concerns. Among them are issues of language. Feminist theology questions whether God needs always to be referred to as "he", and is calling into question the maleness of God. If God is not really exclusively male, but shows qualities of both males and females, then feminist theology insists that prayers, songs, meditations and sermons reflect both qualities of maleness and femaleness as they address God.

Other issues with which feminists are concerned include the issues of ordination and placement. For some denominations women are guaranteed ministerial placement once they have met the requirements of their particular denomination. Not all women who wish to enter the ordained ministry of the church have that advantage. For some women, it is currently impossible to get a hearing of church leaders concerning whether or not the ordination of women will be possible. Still other women find themselves in denominations which ordain them with little or no difficulty. But these women are then confronted with the problem of not being called to serve a church, or being called at lower compensation than

their male colleagues, even though the women may be as qualified as their male counterparts.

A third issue with which feminists are concerned is the issue of inclusiveness. Women ought to be included in the whole ministry of the church. Feminist theology also asks that women as well as men be involved in letting the church know that the message it gives to women is not always one of welcome into the church. By seeing predominately male images (in song, prayer, sermon, etc.) and male role models (ministers, liturgists, etc.), women have too often internalized the idea that the proper role of women in the church really is one of speaking out rarely, and of remaining in secondary roles.

Black and feminist theologies are theologies of liberation. Though he is speaking from a Latin American perspective, Gustavo Guitierrez's definition of liberation theology is valid for our purposes.

The theology of liberation attempts to reflect on the experience and meaning of faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society; this theology must be verified by the practice of that commitment, by active, effective participation in the struggle which the exploited social classes have undertaken against their oppressors. Liberation from every form of exploitation, the possibility of a more human and more dignified life, the creation of a new man, all pass through this struggle.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gustavo Guitierrez, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 307.

Blacks and women share in this struggle. Their theologies are both concerned with the abolition of injustice and they are concerned with the development of a humanity that is non-racist and non-sexist. Blacks have been the only Americans to have suffered the humiliation of slavery; they next have had to suffer the humiliation of continued racial oppression.

Women have been both elevated in America and put down in America. Claiming women to be the weaker sex--intellectually, emotionally, physically--men (and some women) have, under the guise of protecting women, prevented women from fully participating in society. We see the results of that protection today. Women are too much church members and not enough church leaders. And while women are more than 50% of the United States population, they nevertheless constitute far from that proportion of the elected officials. The struggle ought not to be for protection, but for respect and recognition.

Further discussion of black and feminist theologies will take place later in this chapter, but for now I will return to the political and religious predecessors of these two movements. The contention here is that the American social gospel provided the foundation for black and feminist theology in America. A brief sketch of the social gospel in America will show how the foundation was laid.

Like both black theologies and feminist theologies, the social gospel called into question the ways in which

American society was structured to benefit the ruling class. The identification of the social gospel with the growing labor movement in America served to raise the consciousness of the nation's churches about the plight of the underprivileged. And the social gospel was also instrumental in leading the country toward the realization that poverty and wealth do not occur independently of each other. Wealth is too often built on the exploitation of the poor.

Black theology and the social gospel have in common an appeal to the Bible. The social gospel and black theology look to the Old Testament prophets as they forcefully denounce private pietism and as they proclaim God's desire for human justice. What the prophets desired was that the nation would show its piety not through private morality, though that was important, but through the kind of activity which would bring about justice for their neighbors. Just as righteousness and justice were the important issues for the prophets, so they were also for the social gospel.

The social gospel may be viewed as that "type of Christianity that is deeply conscious of the relevance of its message to the life of society and that opposes the exclusion of any sphere of life from its direct influence."<sup>2</sup> The social gospel sought to combine both religious and social

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<sup>2</sup>William Visser't Hooft, The Background of the Social Gospel in America (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1928), p. 16.



thought in the same way American liberation theologians do. Visser't Hooft continues this thought on the social gospel by saying that it is that aspect of Christian thought in which "social and religious influences interpenetrate and react mutually upon one another."<sup>3</sup> For Visser't Hooft the social gospel represented that point at which church and society engaged each other.

The engagement is not new, but black and feminist theologies have made it different. While the social gospel sought to create a society which fits into an established Christian ideal, both feminist and black theology have different agendas. Black and some feminist theologians in fact want to challenge traditional European-influenced Christianity. Their purpose is to have their particular interests recognized as valid theological concerns.

There was an urgency about the social gospel. Supporters of the social gospel spoke with an "impressive seriousness and convincing power that only the consciousness of being faced with matters of life or death for Christianity and civilization could bring. Christendom was at the crossroads."<sup>4</sup> Thus the social gospel strongly emphasized the coming Kingdom of God.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

Supporters of the social gospel believed that they could be instrumental in bringing about the kingdom of God. They believed that the kingdom could come either by means of conflict with evil or by peaceful means. The struggle which the Kingdom defines is always coming and always open to the future. Victories for the Kingdom are measured by the success those seeking the Kingdom might achieve in a given generation; recognition of labor unions, greater civil rights for all Americans, and other social issues are all important in terms of the way God wants the world to be.

Walter Rauschenbusch, one of the social gospel's leading theologians, lists several points which he sees as important to a theological formulation of the Kingdom of God.

1. The Kingdom is divine in its origins, purpose, and consummation;
2. It fulfills the supreme purpose of God by translating theological issues from what is static to what is dynamic;
3. God is in it, therefore the Kingdom is both present and future and it is in all tenses, eternal in the midst of time;
4. The Kingdom gets its distinctive interpretation from Jesus Christ:
  - a. Jesus emancipated the idea of the Kingdom from previous nationalistic limitations and from the debasement of lower religious tendencies, and made it worldwide and spiritual;
  - b. He made the purpose of salvation essential in the Kingdom;
  - c. He imposed his own mind, his personality, his love and holy will on the idea of the Kingdom;
  - d. Jesus both foretold and initiated the Kingdom by his life and work.

5. The Kingdom of God is humanity organized according to the will of God;
6. If the Kingdom of God is the supreme end of God, it must be for the purpose for which the church exists; church must be tested by its effectiveness in creating Kingdom of God;
7. All problems of personal salvation must be considered from the point of view of the Kingdom;
8. The Kingdom of God embraces the whole of human life.<sup>5</sup>

Many of the above elements of the Kingdom of God are present in black and feminist theology. Proponents of those theologies believe that God is dynamic rather than static. Black theologians believe that the person and ministry of Jesus give shape to the task of acquiring black freedom.

It was not unusual for churches to venture into the work place of America and thus into politics. There did exist among supporters of the social gospel the belief that God was an immanent Spirit at work in the world. Barriers between what was considered religious and what was considered profane broke down. The Kingdom of God was already with us. As Rosemary Radford Ruether says:

The Holy Spirit was seen at work not simply or even primarily in ecclesiastical institutions but in the struggle for humanity in society at large. The point of reference for understanding the Kingdom of God, and even the church itself, was the community of mankind in history.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Walter. Rauschenbush, A Theology of the Social Gospel (Nashville: Abingdon, 1945 originally published in 1917), pp. 139-145.

<sup>6</sup>Rosemary Radford Ruether, The Radical Kingdom (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 83. . .note Ruether's pre-feminist understanding of humanity.

With the social gospel, the institutional church began to be used for community and social services as well as for ecclesiastical worship services. Church buildings were often used every day of the week as various clubs, day-care centers for working mothers, and sports programs, were housed within church buildings.<sup>7</sup>

Rauschenbusch was well aware that if the Kingdom of God meant the redemption of society, then freedom had to be a part of the kingdom. Freedom, for Rauschenbusch, had concerns which were political.<sup>8</sup> Workers and capitalists would in Rauschenbusch's schema be joint owners in industry.

Ruether has traced the development of the American social gospel to a late nineteenth-century period in America. Earlier periods of religious revival in America also have social implications. Anti-slavery activity and activities in support of temperance had followed earlier periods of revival. The same is true of the social gospel. In the late nineteenth century, revivialism was influenced by persons such as Walter Rauschenbusch, and there was greater movement toward a broadly applied social ethic.<sup>9</sup>

Labor issues were also of great concern to the social gospel. The growing industrialization of America, with its attendant urbanization, helped to set the context for the social gospel. As America's laborers began organizing

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 88-89.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

themselves into unions, some urban pastors began to involve themselves and their churches in work that was supportive of the labor movement.

Unrealistic optimism has marked the social gospel in America. As Ronald C. White said: "There was little sense of the tragic dimension of history or of the depth and stubbornness of sin and evil."<sup>10</sup> The shape of historical events in the 60 years since 1920 have further disproved the optimism of the social gospel. There have been catastrophic wars, the development and use of nuclear weapons, the death camps of World War II, the threat of ecological catastrophe, and an increase of poverty and underdeveloped countries in the world.

Despite any deficiencies in the social gospel, its influence is nevertheless important for the purposes of this chapter. There are some parallels between the social gospel and black and feminist theology. The appeal of the prophets to the social gospel and to black theology has been mentioned. We spoke of the prophet's desire for public morality rather than merely private piety. Rauschenbusch also touched on another concern of the prophets: He writes:

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<sup>10</sup> Ronald C. White, Jr., and C. Howard Hopkins, The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), p. 285.

The fundamental conviction of the prophets, which distinguished them from the ordinary religious life of their day, was the conviction that God demands righteousness.<sup>11</sup>

The prophets like the proponents of black theology were public people who sought the movement of God in public affairs.

The social gospel was aimed at the urban working class. The particularization with which the social gospel addressed the workers of America speaks to black and feminist concerns today. Rauschenbusch, states that there must be a point of relationship between religion and the social-gospel experiences of the people the church wants to reach.<sup>12</sup> Black and feminist theologians know that if they are to be successful in their tasks, they must relate religious issues and theological beliefs to the social situations of blacks and women.

God in the social gospel is a God of equity. And those who would be followers of God must learn to share with God an aversion to all forms of oppression and political fear. What we have learned from God is an abiding concern to safeguard liberty and to appreciate love.<sup>13</sup> Rauschenbusch believed in 1917 that the state of oppression in which persons lived called into question the kind of justice to which God was committed.<sup>14</sup> He did believe that the Kingdom would come.

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<sup>11</sup>Landis, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>Rauschenbusch, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Rauschenbusch, p. 177.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

But he also realized that even with the social gospel's many benefits, oppression still existed.

Reinhold Niebuhr understood clearly why oppression continued to exist. He knew that political interests and self-interest were and are closely related to one another and that social policy would reflect the self-interest of the policy makers.<sup>15</sup> Once a person understands how individuals acting as parts of groups are affected by power, he or she would have no trouble understanding why and how oppression occurs.

As individuals, men believe that they ought to love and serve each other. As racial, economic, and national groups, they take for themselves whatever power they can command. The disproportion of power in a complex society has perpetuated social injustice in every form through all the ages.<sup>16</sup>

It is the misunderstanding of the use of power that caused the social gospel to fall into the trap of sentimentality. The roots of this sentimentality were formed out of the evolutionary theory of humanity's inevitable progress, romanticism, and the Enlightenment.<sup>17</sup>

Persons who hold power care very little about sentimental, naive religion. What they do care about is holding onto their power. They often have little knowledge of the unjust consequences of their power. "Those who benefit from

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<sup>15</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

social injustice are naturally less capable of understanding its real character than those who suffer from it."<sup>18</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr did a lot of his writing in the period when the social gospel was declining. He has referred to himself as a 'tamed cynic'. In that spirit, he is very clear that humanity cannot sentimentalize, or romanticize, or enlighten the Kingdom into being. Only God's grace will bring the Kingdom.

The man on the cross turned defeat into victory and prophesied the day when love would be triumphant in the world. But, the triumph would have to come through the intervention of God. A sentimental generation has destroyed this apocalyptic note in the vision of the Christ. It thinks the Kingdom of God is around the corner, while he regarded it as impossible of realization, except by God's grace.<sup>19</sup>

Despite its naivete, the social gospel has made some important contributions to the American religious scene. The movement:

1. called the nation to be aware of the country's social ills;
2. counteracted through its support of workers, the Protestant desire for economic individualism;
3. emphasized the conviction that God was on the side of the poor; it also emphasized that Christian love required a concern to transform social and political structures in the interest of social justice;
4. brought about the ecumenical movement (the Federal Council of Churches was formed in 1908).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>20</sup> White and Hopkins, pp. 288-290.



These concerns are seen in modern liberation theologies as persons work together to end oppression.

The social ills of racism and sexism are being addressed; liberation theologies see the value of collective rather than exclusively individual economic systems; most definitions of liberation theology stress God's identification with the oppressed rather than the privileged. And most liberation theologians would insist that the struggle to end oppression and exploitation cannot break down along sectarian lines.

Another lasting effect of the social gospel has been its effect on the mission of the church in society. For the social gospel, "the nature of the gospel is a transforming mission to all mankind in all aspects of their life, and it is the proper role of the church to be a propagandist and agent of social transformation."<sup>21</sup>

It is precisely the task of social transformation to which liberation theologies address themselves. Letty Russell's definition of liberation is as follows: it is "an attempt to reflect upon the experience of oppression and divine-human actions for the new creation of a more humane society."<sup>22</sup> While this definition is true for both black

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<sup>21</sup>Ruether, p. 91.

<sup>22</sup>Letty Russell, "A Feminist Looks at Black Theology," in Calvin E. Bruce and Willia Jones (eds.) Black Theology (Lewisburg: Buckness University Press, 1978), p. 259.

and feminist theologies, there is still tension between the two movements. Black theology tends to be male-dominated. Feminist theology, on the other hand, has been dominated by middle-class women. Both groups have been primarily focused on themselves and have given too little thought to the way in which racism, sexism, and economic exploitation are interconnected.<sup>23</sup>

Feminist theology may be defined as "an attempt to reflect on the meaning of God's will for full human liberation in order to advocate the partnership of women and men in human society."<sup>24</sup> Russell calls this definition feminist because it is inclusive of both sexes.

The church has a clear tradition of sexism. The Bible and most of the male-dominated theological literature have been used to support the oppression of women. It has been suggested that "theology must critically evaluate and reject those traditions that have contributed to the oppression of women."<sup>25</sup> Everyone who is engaged in doing theology brings his or her own subjectivity to the task. To pretend

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<sup>23</sup> Pauli Murray, "Black and Feminist Theology: A Comparative View", Anglican Theological Review, LX (January 1978), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Russell, p. 249

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Towards a Liberating and Liberated Theology: Women Theologians and Feminist Theology in the USA" in Jean-Pierre Jossua and Johann Baptist Metz (eds.) Doing Theology in New Places (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 29.

that one can approach theology in some sort of neutral state is folly. The issue of feminist theology is different from both traditional European and other liberation theologies, though it shares in the tasks of those theologies. It is more universal because it deals with how women of every race, class, and culture are dealt with by male-dominated societies<sup>26</sup>

The nature of sexism is built into the fabric of Christian theology. Sexism is "a structural evil that distorts and corrupts theology and the Christian message."<sup>27</sup> It is so pervasive, in fact, that its effects are seen even in black theology. While black theologians decry the use of white images and motifs in theology, they "seem to have no difficulty with patriarchal symbolism."<sup>28</sup> The language which symbolizes patriarchal perspectives is emphatically masculine. Women are to know somehow that they are included in male language and imagery. Masculine language denies the inclusiveness of God; while "Christian theology has always known that God transcends gender as well as race, its speaking of God as Father and as Son communicates to women as well as men the fact that maleness and not femaleness expresses and encompasses the divine reality."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

<sup>28</sup> Murray, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Schussla Fiorenza, p. 29.

Language is important and the way in which black theology trivializes the issue illustrates the kind of ignorance with which black and feminist theologies often engage each other. They are both missing an important danger signal. Both theologies could be forces for real Christian change. But "the danger is that they are so particularized that issues such as universal liberation and reconciliation, issues which are at the center of the gospel become obscured."<sup>30</sup>

Neither of these theologies can save the church. But they can continue to challenge traditional Western Christianity's assumptions about what is valid theology. Black and feminist theology can make the church more inclusive of the wide spectrum of Christian thought.

An examination of black theology is in order. J. Deotis Roberts identifies liberation and reconciliation as its main poles. He says:

Liberation is revolutionary, for blacks it points to what ought to be. Black Christians desire radical and rapid change in America as a matter of survival. Black theology is a theology of liberation. We believe that the Christian faith is avowedly revolutionary and, it may speak to this need with great force.

Reconciliation must be a post-revolutionary goal. Things being the way they are in the racial crisis in America, there must be a revolution. Black theology is interested in what results from this radical and rapid change, whether chaos or community. [Roberts seeks revolution in race relations with reconciliation; he wants] a Christian theological approach to race

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<sup>30</sup> Murray, pp. 3-4.

relations that will lead us beyond a hypocritical tokenism to liberation as a genuine reconciliation between equals.<sup>31</sup>

Black theology is important because the questions which the existence of racism in America raises require answers from a Christian perspective.<sup>32</sup> One of the questions raised by racism has to do with the notion of black inferiority. To be sure, there was, before and during slavery, discussion about the assumption that blacks were spiritually, emotionally, and biologically inferior. But whites did not begin earnest discussion of the issue until newly freed blacks began to threaten the economic, political, and social power of whites.<sup>33</sup>

What is happening with black people is that they are no longer threatened by white paranoia. Whether or not whites feel threatened, blacks are more freely becoming self-determined and proud. And they are actively seeking those things (traditions, heritage) that are authentically black.<sup>34</sup> Black theology is important because it gives critical interpretation to the experiences about which only black peoples can speak.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>J. Deotis Roberts, Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), pp. 27-28.

<sup>32</sup>J. Deotis Roberts, "Black Consciousness in Theological Perspective," in James J. Gardiner and J. Deotis Roberts (eds.) Quest for a Black Theology (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1971), p. 65.

<sup>33</sup>Major Jones, Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 61.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 64.      <sup>35</sup>Roberts, Liberation, p. 18.

It is the black religious experience which has been important to black survival in America.

If there are no atheists in foxholes, it may likewise be said that few blacks have been afforded the luxury of disbelieving in divine existence. The existence of God does not, therefore, need to be established through the several 'proofs' and a black theology may begin with a primary faith that God is.<sup>36</sup>

The problem of God for blacks has more to do with God's character than God's existence. Black theology has been criticized from within because some strains are reactions black radicalism, and other strains of it are reaction against white intellectualism. Cecil W. Cone, the brother of James Cone (whose position on black theology will be discussed in the next chapter), believes that it is inadequate for black theology to have a starting point other than black religion<sup>37</sup> because other starting points separate black Christians from the center of their faith. The God to whom supporters of the American social gospel appealed has some relevance to blacks. Roberts says:

If faith is to be both comforting and meaningful to the black man in the United States, he must be assured that the God of the Christian creed is a benevolent and provident God. The black man must place his trust in a gracious God who superintends all his creatures. The absence of God is of academic interest, but the presence of God is an abiding existential concern. This is perhaps why black Christians have received so much inspiration

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<sup>36</sup>Roberts, "Black Consciousness", p. 18.

<sup>37</sup>Cecil Wayne Cone, The Identity Crisis in Black Theology (Nashville: AMEC, 1975), p. 18.

and comfort for them. The God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob is a living and present God.<sup>38</sup>

The same God called and calls sinners to judgment, repentance, and grace. The next chapter of this essay, which will discuss in detail the theologies of Rosemary Radford Ruether and James Cone, will deal with a different concept of God. It will deal with views of God as presented from the perspectives of two Christians who are angry and troubled by the way in which God has been presented to the world, to blacks, and to women. Their view of God is neither sentimental nor naive. The positions they will present are different, but they are equally challenging and stimulating to students of black and feminist theology.

Both black and feminist theologies have points in common with the movement known as the social gospel and those points will become clearer in subsequent chapters. Black theology is concerned with issues of freedom, autonomy, and participation as whole persons in the society at large. Black theology looks to a transcendent God as the One from whom freedom is given.

Feminist theological issues can be identified as those issues which concern language, hierarchy, and ecclesiology. How the church can best recognize the way in which it limits itself by insisting that God, leadership, and the

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<sup>38</sup> Roberts, "Black Consciousness", p. 69.

church at large can only be represented by male imagery is a central concern of feminist theology.

None of the above mentioned categories are mutually exclusive. Issues which concern feminist theology can affect black theology and vice versa. But for the most part, these are issues with which each particular theology is concerned.

Black and feminist theologies and the social gospel share a view of humanity which recognizes that people are often exploited because of reasons beyond their control. People can be born either black and/or female. And they can be born into a specific socioeconomic class. There are persons born into the racial, sexual, or socio-economic group which controls much of the power in America. What the three theological movements dealt with in this chapter have in common is the desire that those who are powerless in this society do not remain in that condition. That they label their movements "theologies" suggests their belief that God does not wish the powerless to remain in that state either. The idea of the Kingdom of God represents for those theologies the realization that God has heard the cries of the non-privileged and that God's justice and mercy will win the day.

There is no central Christological viewpoint which unites black and feminist theologies of liberation and the social gospel. Black theology and the social gospel believe that the ministry of Jesus provides the model by which Christian praxis is to take place. Feminists much as Mary Daly and



Rosemary Radford Ruether have different points of view about the man Jesus and his role in feminist theology. Daly no longer considers herself a Christian. Ruether is still a Christian, although, as will be seen in the next chapter, she holds a Christological viewpoint that is different than that of traditional theology.

We do not yet know if black and feminist theologies of liberation will be influential in the churches in 60 years. But they can make the most of the attention they are currently receiving and in that way assure that some of their influence continues to be felt among persons engaged in theological work.

## CHAPTER THREE

## THE THEOLOGIES OF CONE AND RUETHER COMPARED

James Cone and Rosemary Radford Ruether are only two of the many voices currently being raised in the areas of black and feminist theologies of liberation. They are, however, perhaps the two best known thinkers in their respective areas of liberation theology. There are voices more moderate than James Cone in black theology, and there are more militant voices than Rosemary Radford Ruether in feminist theology. But these two present their cases well. Cone and Ruether were chosen as the subjects of this particular chapter because of the ways in which they address theology and the church. Both have remained Christians. Yet they each offer challenging critiques to white, male-dominated, European-influenced theology. Cone identifies issues which are at the heart of black theology of liberation. Ruether has identified issues which are central to feminist liberation concerns.

In the previous chapter, definitions of black theology and feminist theology were offered. Black theology was defined as a Christian response to the black power movement. Black theology's concern is with presenting theology from a perspective which speaks to the needs of black people. Feminist theology was previously defined as a movement in theology which is concerned with the way in which women have been discriminated against throughout and because of patriarchal history.

James Cone is currently Charles A. Briggs Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He is the author of several books about black theology including Black Theology and Black Power (1969) and A Black Theology of Liberation (1970). Material for this chapter has been drawn primarily from Cone's God of the Oppressed (1975). Cone is concerned that black people have the opportunity to tell their theological story as that story is defined within the black community (Spirituals and the Blues, 1972). White theologians, according to Cone, present a perverted view of theology because it completely ignores the black story.

Rosemary Radford Ruether is currently the Georgia Harkness Professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. Like James Cone, Ruether is the author of several books, including Liberation Theology (1972), Faith and Fratricide (1974), Gregory of Nazianzus (1969) and The Radical Kingdom (1970). She has devoted extensive research and written widely in the areas of Mariology and Christian-Jewish traditions and relationships. Her book New Woman, New Earth (1975) is the source for much of the material used in this chapter. Ruether is concerned that women not be identified and therefore limited by sexist social or theological notions about the nature of women.

## JAMES CONE

Cone's first book, Black Theology and Black Power, was published at a time when black people had begun to press more forcefully for their rights as citizens of the United States and as human beings. Cone's early presentation of how black power related to black theology placed him squarely in the black power camp, but some of his black colleagues were critical of his position. J. Deotis Roberts believed that Cone's position was neither faithful to black power nor to black Christianity. He accused Cone of being "on the fence between the Christian faith and the religion of black power."<sup>1</sup> Robert's critique of Cone is not entirely accurate. It is true that Cone has strongly identified himself with the black power movement. But it is also true that the two movements, black theology and black power, are not mutually exclusive as far as Cone is concerned. Black Christianity is black power for Cone. It should be further noted that Robert's criticism of Cone is based on work completed several years ago. That same critique could not apply today. Cone's thinking during the past ten years has changed, as the material from God of the Oppressed and other late work demonstrate.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Deotis Roberts, Liberation and Reconciliation; A Black Tehology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), p. 21.

Cone's brother, Cecil, says, "The manner in which Cone utilizes black power in the development of his theology suggests an uncritical acceptance of the movement, which leads to problems in his work."<sup>2</sup> Those problems include: (1) difficulty with black activity which is non-revolutionary, as in the activity of Denmark Vessey us that of Booker T. Washington; (2) the romantization of pre-Civil War heroes (those who led slave rebellions); and (3) having black power as his theological base.<sup>3</sup>

Cone argues that his theological base is not black power, but rather that the foundation of his theology is built on the strength of the black church. It is in the black church, Cone insists, that black Christians learn to deal successfully with black life in America. "In the larger, 'secular' black community, this perspective on life is often called the 'art' of survival, but in the black church we call it the grace of God."<sup>4</sup> Black Christians have learned to rely on the grace of God, in part, because of the tools they have learned from a church that is dedicated to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At a conference held in Mexico City in 1977, Cone identified the responsibility of the church as that of

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<sup>2</sup>Cecil Wayne Cone, The Identity Crisis in Black Theology (Nashville: AMEC, 1975), p. 95.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 96-97. <sup>4</sup>James H. Cone, God of the Oppressed (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 2.

"preaching and living the gospel of Jesus Christ in a highly industrialized and capitalistic society."<sup>5</sup> In this country, the maintenance of industry and the capitalist system of industrialism depend in large part on minority labor. Often under-skilled and underpaid, such persons find themselves in at least symbolic bondage to the ruling powers which continue to dominate their lives. It is within this specter of bondage that Cone sees the task of Christian theology. He submits, "I believe that Christian theology is language about God. But it is more than that, and it is the 'more' that makes theology Christian. Christian theology is language about the liberating character of God's presence in Jesus Christ as he calls his people into being for freedom in the world."<sup>6</sup>

Liberation and freedom are for Cone the major concerns of Christian theology, and he defines the work of the theologian in terms of these two concerns. Cone identifies several tasks of the theologian:

1. The theologian is an exegete of scripture and existence. While the Bible is the primary source of theological discourse, part of the theologian's exegetical task also includes existence. Scripture is not an abstract word with no

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<sup>5</sup>James H. Cone, "Christian Faith and Political Praxis" (Paper prepared for the October 1977 Mexico City Conference on "Encounter of Theologians"), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>J. H. Cone, God, p. 17.

concrete meaning. To be an exegete is to interpret God's word to the humiliated and the oppressed.

2. The theologian is a prophet who makes it clear that God's gospel stands in judgment against the existing order of injustice.

3. The theologian is a teacher who instructs persons in Christian faith. The theologian clarifies the meaning and significance of human life and acts as a defender of Christian faith.

4. The theologian is a philosopher who observes alternative interpretations of the meaning of life. A Christian philosopher is intellectually honest and guards against dogmatism.<sup>7</sup> If a theologian cannot see the relation between the gospel and the oppressed of the land, then by Cone's definition that person has not been true to the theologian's task.

Truth for Cone comes from the context of experience. Truth is that which "cannot be separated from the people's struggle and the hopes and dreams that arise from that struggle. Truth is that transcendent reality, disclosed in the people's historical struggle for liberation, which enables them to know that their fight for freedom is not futile. The affirmation of truth means that the freedom hoped for will be realized."<sup>8</sup> In this context, Cone defines truth as black truth

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

as it has been disclosed in the history and in the culture of black people.

Cone's definition of black theology is not very different from the definition offered in the previous chapter. He believes black theology to be that theology which is "of and for black people. It is an examination of their stories, tales and sayings. It is an investigation of the mind into the raw materials of our pilgrimage, telling the story of 'how we got over.' For theology to be black it must reflect upon what it means to be black."<sup>9</sup>

Truth and experience are relevant for Cone. While he makes the point that the black experience is but one source of truth, knowing the truth of this experience occupies an important place in Cone's perspective. He believes that "the survival and liberation of black people depends on our recognition of the truth when it is spoken and lived by the people. If we cannot recognize the truth, then it cannot liberate us from untruth. To know the truth is to appropriate it, for it is mainly reflection and theory."<sup>10</sup> The truth which must still be appreciated by black people is that of continuing racism in this country.

Under-employment or unemployment, substandard housing, food, education and political representation are truths which

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 30.



black and white Americans must face. The black church has been successful to the degree that it has helped people to face the truth of black reality. Admittedly, poverty is not the whole truth of black existence, but it is the truth for much of black America.

Scripture and the portrait of Jesus found there have been the source of black hope in times of despair and hopelessness. This was especially present during slavery. Cone reminds us that,

It was Scripture that enabled slaves to affirm a view of God that differed radically from that of the slave masters. The slave masters' intention was to present a Jesus who would make the slave obedient and docile. Jesus was supposed to make black people better slaves, that is, faithful servants of white masters. But many blacks rejected that view of Jesus, not only because it contradicted their African heritage, but because it contradicted the witness of Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

The exodus story of Yawheh's liberation of slaves and the words of liberation which Jesus spoke are parts of the Christian tradition as it speaks to black people.

In Cone's Christology, Jesus Christ identifies with the weak and the oppressed. Cone refers to Jesus as an "event of liberation, a happening in the lives of oppressed people struggling for political freedom."<sup>12</sup> That Jesus stands with the weak and helpless is, for Cone, part of the plan of God's incarnation. He concludes that, "because God became

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

man in Jesus Christ, he disclosed the divine will to be with humanity in our wretchedness. And because we blacks accept his presence in Jesus as the true definition of our humanity, blackness and divinity are dialectically bound together as one reality."<sup>13</sup>

God takes on human qualities in the historical event of Jesus. History is important for Cone's formulation because it is in history that concrete events occur. Cone's analysis is partially dependent on the work of Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx. Using Feuerbach's belief that "theology is anthropology," Cone says of Feuerbach that "the clue to the meaning of the real, is not found in philosophical abstractions but in concrete life; its feelings, wants and needs. The uncovering of truth, therefore, is not identified with the rational investigation of the unfolding of the Absolute Idea, but with the analysis of the common experience of humanity."<sup>14</sup>

Cone believes that "Marx's chief contribution was his disclosure of the ideological character of bourgeois thought, indicating the connection between the 'ruling material force of society' and the 'ruling intellectual force.'"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

These two nineteenth-century thinkers are important to Cone because they demonstrate that there is a connection between ideas and concrete reality. The former takes shape only with the latter, or it remains abstract speculation. Black theology must involve praxis if it is to challenge the status quo in a prophetic way. Political theologies such as black theology and feminist theology are opposed to the religion because it justifies the present material relations and also because it serves as a sedative for the oppressed, making them remain content with humiliation and suffering."<sup>16</sup>

Black theology and other political theologies have a different agenda for religion. Their aim is for religion to confront a system which justifies and maintains itself through the oppression of others. Ruling-class religion is the opiate about which Marx spoke. Political religion, in the sense that it is expressed in black theology, is a stimulant which causes people to seek aggressively their rights as human beings. Cone believes white theology to be in the camp with ruling-class religion. White theologians are viewed as so shaped by white sociopolitical interests that their dealings with matters of faith and history are limited to defending the white religious status quo.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

Black and white notions of religion differ, according to Cone, in that "black people did not desire various philosophical arguments for God's existence, because the God of history, the Liberator of the oppressed from bondage."<sup>18</sup> Cone is saying that black religion is less abstract than white religion. The use of the Exodus story is important for blacks because it is the story of God's freeing oppressed people from physical bondage. The bondage in which some blacks find themselves is economic and emotional. But black faith believes that God still acts in history and will free those who are in bondage once again. God's activity is always in behalf of the weak and helpless. That is why the Israelite slaves were freed rather than kept in bondage. What God seeks is justice and liberation for the oppressed.

The appeal of the Exodus story to blacks certainly does not negate the importance of the New Testament in the quest for liberation. "The New Testament gospel of liberation turns our priority system upside down and demands that we fight for the freedom of those in captivity."<sup>19</sup> Recalling Luke 4, Cone suggests that any proclamation of liberation will be bad news to those who depend on the exploitation of others for their prosperity.<sup>20</sup> The New Testament adds an

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

important element to the Old Testament story of liberation. That element is the existence of the cross and the resurrection.

Cone elaborates that the "cross and the resurrection of Jesus stand at the center of the New Testament story, without which nothing is revealed that was not already known in the Old Testament. In the light of Jesus' death and resurrection, this earthly life achieves a radical significance not otherwise possible."<sup>21</sup> The cross is central for Cone and for black theology as it speaks of God and God's activity as both historical and transcendent reality. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates that God is the final judge of history. Cone continues his theme of a transcendent God when he speaks of the authenticity of black theology. What makes black theology authentic, he states, is not that it speaks solely to the needs of black Americans, but that it points beyond historical manifestation. Black theology is authentic theology because it points to God.<sup>22</sup>

Cone might be accused of being shaped by his sociopolitical interests in the same way he accuses white theologians of being shaped by theirs. His detractors have said that black theology, especially when so polemically expressed by Cone, is really nothing more than ideology. Cone understands

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

ideology to be "deformed thought in which an idea or ideas are nothing but the function of the subjective interest of an individual group."<sup>23</sup> It is true that work concerning those things of interest to black people will not always be treated with absolute objectivity. What prevents black theology from being mere ideology is that black theology has in common with other liberation theologies the replacement of unjust treatment with justice and respect. The importance of the black story is made clear in Cone's understanding of the two elements involved in ideology. Both elements add to the distorted thinking which ideology involves. Cone submits that "ideology in the particular sense is telling the biblical story in the light of the economic and social interests of a few. Ideology, on the particular level, is especially a serious danger to oppressed people who are afraid of the political consequences of the divine Word in their midst. The risks of fighting against oppression can lead to passive resignation (cf. Ex. 14: 11-13). Ideology in a general sense represents a form of thinking whose intellectual grid exclude as priori the truth of the biblical story."<sup>25</sup>

Cone believes that blacks should not accept the white story uncritically. No group's story should be considered

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

without critical reflection. For Cone, ideology in the particular sense, is exemplified by those whites who believe that their notions about God are the standard against which all others are measured. The biblical story is not the basis for what they believe about God. Rather, a false belief about the moral superiority of whites has influenced the way the Bible is used by racists. That is why whites mistakenly believed that hearing the gospel would make slaves docile. They were viewing the Bible not in terms of its stories of freedom from oppression but in terms of the ways in which slaves could be made more obedient to those who sought to control them (cf. Colossians 3:22). Cone urges black people not internalize a story of existence which will make them responsible for their own oppression.

Cone also believes that it is the oppressed who have the greater interest in liberation issues. He avoids the ideology trap by stating that his is a Christian theology revealed through a God who stands with the weak and helpless against oppressors. Yet, God's revelatory word is certainly a word of liberation to those who are bound. But it can also be a word of liberation to those who bind and therefore may suffer another kind of bondage. Cone urges the black community to avoid the assumption that they alone can decide what is valid in terms of the move toward freedom. They struggle because they have responded to God's call for liberation, not because they by themselves are able to do so.

If they act as if God's words are their own, then they have fallen into the trap of ideology at the expense of theology.

A summary of Cone's thought is found in his explanation of why God identifies with the oppressed rather than with the oppressors. He states,

This is the dialectic of Christian thought: God enters into the social context of human existence and appropriates the ideas and actions of the oppressed as his own. When this event of liberation occurs in thought and praxis, the words and actions of the oppressed become the Word and Action of God. They no longer belong to the oppressed. Indeed, the word of the oppressed becomes God's Word insofar as the former recognize it not as their own but given to them through divine grace. The oppressed have been elected, not because of the intrinsic value of their word or action but because of God's grace and free-to be with the weak in troubled times.<sup>26</sup>

Cone is guilty of the ideology which he decries in others. He still makes the point that God becomes present with the helpless in their times of trouble.

The Christian believes that God stands with him or her, especially during times of oppression. Jesus is perceived as the divine event of liberation which speaks into our social existence and "places us in a new sociopolitical context wherein we are given the gift of faith for the creation of a new future for ourselves and for humanity."<sup>27</sup> The meaning of Christ is found in scripture which points toward Jesus and liberation. Christian tradition also has importance here because it is the bridge between scripture and the

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 109.



contemporary situation. Scripture and tradition help us to discover a social context from which we derive theology.

Further discussion of the historical Jesus is warranted because, "without the historical Jesus, theology is left with a docetic Christ who is said to be human but is actually nothing but an idea-principle in a theological systems."<sup>28</sup>

Jesus stand with the oppressed because, as a Jew in Roman occupied territory, Jesus was one of the oppressed. Cone makes the point that Jesus' death was political and that his resurrection has political implications for those seeking liberation. Jesus Christ is the crucified man and the risen Lord. For Cone,

The resurrection is a political event. The politics of the resurrection is found in its gift of freedom to the poor and helpless. Being granted freedom while they are still poor, they can know that their poverty is a contrived phenomenon, traceable to the rich and the powerful in this world. This is new knowledge about themselves and the world, as disclosed in and through the resurrection, and requires that the poor practice political activity against the social and economic structure that makes them poor. Not to fight is to deny the reality of Christ's presence with us in the struggle to liberate the slaves from bondage. This is the political side of the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

Jesus calls oppressed people out of bondage and into freedom. The act of God raising Jesus from the tomb demonstrates that God and not earthly forces will carry the day.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

Black and Latin American liberation theologians look to Jesus Christ as a political symbol. Albert Cleage has spoken of the Black Messiah as a term for Christ. J. Deotis Roberts understands the Black Messiah to be more symbolic than literal.<sup>30</sup> Myth and symbol function as that which stands for what people know about reality. The Black Messiah is a way of speaking about Christ's stand with the oppressed. Christ is so identified with the oppressed that he becomes one of them.

Cone speaks of a black Christ in these terms. Saying that to speak of a universal is meaningless if there is not a particular to make it concrete, Cone explains what the black Christ means to him.

To say that Christ is black means that God, in his infinite wisdom and mercy, not only take color seriously, he takes it upon himself and discloses his will to make us whole, new creatures born in the spirit of divine blackness, and redeemed through the blood of the black Christ. Christ is black therefore, not because of some cultural or psychological need of black people, but because and only because Christ really enters into our world where the poor, the despised, and the black are disclosing that he is with them, enduring their humiliation and pain and transforming oppressed slaves into liberated servants.<sup>31</sup>

The black Christ is for Cone symbolic of the total identification of God through Christ with the oppressed of the land. Because Christ is with the poor, they need not give in to nor internalize their oppression. Freedom comes from God through Christ only.

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<sup>30</sup> Roberts, p. 130.      <sup>31</sup> J.H. Cone, God, p. 136.

As to the question of who is liberated, Cone states that none are truly free until all of the oppressed are liberated. But ~~the~~ the measure of liberation achievable is limited to the consciousness of freedom as defined by the oppressed and downtrodden in their fight for justice."<sup>32</sup> The oppressed must actively participate in the achievement of justice or liberation will not take place.

Full liberation is always a future event. But Cone sees that, for liberation to take place, the oppressed must live as if their hope has already been realized. "Those who see God's coming liberation breaking into the present must live as if the future is already in their midst. They must bear witness to humanity's liberation by freeing the present from the past and for the future."<sup>33</sup> It is in the present that God's word must be declared. The past should not grip the oppressed, nor should God's future be idealized to the point that it never comes, but is always on the way. For black people, the eschaton must have meaning and manifestation in the present as well as in the future. Cone explains that,

eschatology for blacks must be both realized and unrealized. Whereas the evangelical-pietistic version of eschatology is pre-occupied with the future, Black Theology must begin, I believe with the present. In other words, for black Christians realized eschatology, the manifestation of the will of God in the present, abstractly as social justice, and concretely as goods

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

and services to 'humanize' life, must be the first consideration for a doctrine pointing to the eventual consummation of God's purposes in creation and history.<sup>34</sup>

Cone believes that there can be no Christian praxis which does not begin with faith and obedience. For Cone faith, action, and obedience must go together. Political praxis is part of God's liberation. There must also exist an element of hope, otherwise persons begin to despair of their actions. "Despair is the logical consequence of a praxis that does not know the eschatological hope derived from historical struggle."<sup>35</sup> God reigns in the present and will continue to reign in the future. Knowledge of God as the One who calls us to freedom is what gives oppressed persons the courage to seek freedom.

Still, black people suffer the humiliation of racist, elitist oppression. Cone believes that there is an explanation for black suffering. It is not suffering without a purpose.

To share in Yawheh's inauguration of divine righteousness involves the willingness to suffer in the struggle of freedom. Election therefore is not a privileged status that is given to favorite people. It is a call to serve, to suffer with God in the divine realization of justice in the world. For the oppressed, justice is the rescue from hurt, and for the oppressors it is the removal of the power to hurt others, even against their will, so that justice can be realized for all.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> J.H. Cone, "Christian Faith", p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> J.H. Cone, God, p. 172.

Christ has not shown us how to suffer. Instead he has shown us that, while suffering is painful, there will be a day when justice will come, and those who have suffered in its cause will be vindicated.

Suffering builds community. For Cone, it is the shared experiences of the oppressed which cause community to take shape. He asserts that "koinonia is limited to the victims of oppression and does not include the oppressors. The ethical behavior of Christians, therefore, is defined in and by the oppressed community whom God has called into being for freedom."<sup>37</sup> Cone's understanding of community demonstrates that a free community must be without oppression. The question is how to eliminate oppression.

The black power movement was not opposed to the use of violence. Black theology is a Christian response to black power. Does black theology support violence? Does Cone? In 1969, Cone did not exclude the possibility of violence in his formulation. He believed that violence in response to an evil system might be necessary. By 1975, Cone softened his approach to violence. He no longer urged the use of violence. He states rather, that "because the oppressed have been victims of mental and physical dehumanization, we cannot make the destruction of humanity, even among the oppressors the slaves but to transform humanity, or in the words of Fanon,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

to 'set afoot a new man.' Thus hatred and vengeance have no place in the struggle for freedom."<sup>38</sup>

Cone wants justice, not revenge. The point must be made, though, that Cone does not stand in the non-violent camp with Martin Luther King, Jr. In fact, Cone is critical of King on the issue of violence. King, according to Cone, seemed unaware of the violence committed against black people. Otherwise he would not have been so absolutely against violence. Cone also correctly points out that cries for non-violence are most often heard from whites when blacks begin to arm and protect themselves. The question of violence is for Cone: Whose violence do we support, theirs or ours?

Cone is not uncritically receptive to appeals for black-white reconciliation. He looks upon such appeals with a great deal of suspicion. "They who are responsible for the dividing walls of hostility, racism, and hatred, want to know whether the victims are ready to forgive and forget, without changing the balance of power."<sup>39</sup> Cone believes that such a view of reconciliation is contrary to the Christian view of reconciliation. A Christian view of reconciliation is forgiving, but it recognizes that the sin of oppression has taken place. Cone urges his colleagues to be aware of the costs of reconciliation. He states, "we black theologians must refuse

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

to accept a view of reconciliation that pretends that slavery never existed, that we were not lynched and shot, and that presently we are not being cut to the core of our physical and mental endurance."<sup>40</sup>

Cone's understanding of reconciliation is this. It is "not only what God does in order to deliver oppressed people from captivity, it is also what oppressed people do in order to remain faithful to their new gift of freedom. Reconciliation is not simply freedom from oppression and slavery; it is also freedom for God."<sup>41</sup>

James Cone's contribution to black theology is important in that his is one of the most confrontive voices in black theology today. Cone is in favor of black self-determination and self-definition.

Still, Cone has some liabilities. In my view, God is not just for the poor; God is the creator of all that exists and God calls us all to live responsible, just lives. Cone's focus has been on black males, though his most recent writings have shown a trend toward more inclusive language. In addition, Cone's focus is, for the most part, American. The United States is the sphere of experience for Cone and other black American theologians. Cone's experience of oppression has been that of a black American man and it is

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

natural that his critique should focus on this part of the world. His participation in the conference on theologies in Mexico City is indicative of his broadening liberation interests. Cone's style is polemic. He presents an argument for his beliefs and invites response from those who would challenge him.

ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER

Ruether's emphasis is different from Cone's. It is true that they both share a strong desire to see the oppressed come to liberation. But while Cone works for liberation through the black community, Ruether's focus is on universal freedom, especially as realized through the liberation of women. She shares with Letty Russell a desire for all persons to be free from oppressive structures, and she speaks to this desire from a feminist perspective.<sup>42</sup>

Ruether is very clear in her belief that the historical and universal subjugation of women is primordial and that it is the foundation for all other kinds of oppression. Ruether says,

Sexual symbolism is foundational to the perception of order and relationships that has been built up in cultures. The psychic organization of consciousness, the

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<sup>42</sup> Pauli Murray, "Black Theology and Feminist Theology, A Comparative View," Anglican Theological Review, LX (January 1978), 12.



dualistic view of the self and the world, the hierarchical concept of society, the relation of humanity and nature, and of God and creation, all these relationships have been modeled on sexual dualism.<sup>43</sup>

Oppression of minorities, the environment, and the poor result from the world view which Ruether describes. The above statement by Ruether summarizes her thought. What follows is elaboration and explanation.

Ruether states that oppressed women find themselves in a double bind.

Men are assigned the active, volitional, and intellectual powers of the self. Women have the receptive, emotive and nurturing roles. This also defines a socioeconomic relation between the productive system and the home. Women, seeking liberation from dependency, are impelled to move in a masculine direction and to value those qualities regarded as male while despising those qualities regarded as feminine, while at the same time being villified for having lost their femininity.<sup>44</sup>

Economic status reflects social status and inherent human worth for women and for other oppressed groups.

Using categories such as "Conquest of Mother," "Negation of Mother," and "Sublimation of Mother," Ruether contends that women have not always had inferior status. The move from rural to urban life and the Western world's shift from agriculture to industry affected the status of both men and women. In rural areas, while men occupied as hunters and warriors, women were food gatherers, gardeners, medical

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<sup>43</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman, New Earth (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

practioners, weavers, and potters. Their domestic skills gave them a certain economic clout in the home and in the community. Urban life changed political and power structures. Industrialization removed the place of production from the home. Women who had previously been very important in terms of production were assigned quite marginal economic roles. The sphere of productivity had left the home. Domestic skills were devalued.<sup>45</sup>

Ruether, among others, has noted that a feminist understanding did develop in the nineteenth century.

Depletion of women's economic role in the home through industrialization also created a new restlessness in middle-and upper-class women who were left with insufficient meaningful work at home. Women began to rebel against the traditional ideologies of subjugation and to demand civil rights and entrance into education and professions. Working-class women in the factories were swept into the union movement, but found themselves opposed not only by the owning classes, but by male unionists as well. Industrialization completed the earlier marginalization of women's place culturally and politically by economic marginalization. But it also created a new level of contradiction between women's experience of their own capacities and the shrunken and dependent place assigned to them, and so led to the rise of a mass feminist struggle to alter the classical images and roles of women.<sup>46</sup>

Ruether is not unaware of the elitist nature of nineteenth-century industrialization. There is no quarrel with her statement that the "development of class distinction allowed elite males to manage the collective resources of

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<sup>45</sup> Ruether, New Woman, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

society for their own benefit."<sup>47</sup> Nor is there any quarrel with the contention that women were largely excluded from spheres of public life. But Ruether does not note the extent to which some women participated in elitist oppression by accepting their privileged status while other women maintained their homes. Feminism in the nineteenth century was an important issue. Liberation in any era is important. But for liberation to be really present, everyone must be included, regardless of their socioeconomic condition.

The exclusion of women from public roles during the last century and after has its roots in the view of woman which developed several centuries before. Male elitism was pervasive throughout the Western world and found support in religious spheres. "The priestly and scribal classes projected artificial ideologies of male intellectual superiority in the realm of Spirit and culture to justify the monopolization of this power in the hands of the male ruling class."<sup>48</sup> The implication is that, even though women were superior in terms of spiritual issues, they could nevertheless not be a part of the male-dominated religious sphere.

The negative view of women in the nineteenth century reflects the way in which women had come to be viewed by a society dominated by men. Ruether contends that one of the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

reasons for the belief that women had no place in public life came from the devaluation of the mother-goddess. She submits that

the mother-goddess symbol represents a society directly interacting and dependent on nature for survival, an experience which persisted for peasant peoples even after the urban revolution. The importance of women in a family-centered economy, the centrality of the mother as life-giver of every child, makes woman the symbol of 'nature.' This symbolic role of women is gradually repressed or subordinated by a male elite, who begin to rationalize an artificial debilitation of women in more developed social organization, and who begin to feel themselves the masters, rather than the children, of organic nature.<sup>49</sup>

Greek and Hebrew culture participated in the negation of mother-goddess in the way they dealt with nature. "Mother-nature" is placed below transcendent male nature. In the period of classical Greek and Hebrew culture, the male elite sought

to master nature by not basing themselves on it and by not exalting it as an independent divine power, but by subordinating it and linking their essential selves with a transcendent principle beyond nature which is pictured as intellectual and male. This represents the projection of the ego or consciousness of ruling class males who envision a reality, beyond the physical process which gave them birth, as the source of their being.<sup>50</sup>

Men locate their true origins in the transcendent sphere of reality, and they locate the true origins of women in the realm of carnal nature. It is on this basis that men claim power over lower female nature.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-14.

The dualistic way in which men and women are defined in Western culture is the focus of Ruether's concern. Much of what she says about male-female relations has the dualistic view of males and females at its roots. Ruether's contention is that creation somehow became removed from nature to the point that men began to dominate nature.

The primal matrix of life no longer encompasses spiritual power, gods and souls, but is debased as mere 'matter' (a word that means mother). Matter is created by an ego-fiat from a transcendent 'Mind'. Sky and earth, once complementary, become hierarchial. Maleness is identified with intellectuality and spirituality; femaleness is identified with the lower material nature. This also defines the female as ontologically dependent and morally inferior to maleness.<sup>51</sup>

The myth of male superiority is carried to the extent that, in the second creation story, woman is actually born from man (Gen. 2:21-22). Hebrew and Greek culture developed an ideology in which the true self is the male soul and pre-exists the body which is female.

Because women are identified with that which is carnal rather than transcendent, they are identified with what is sinful.

Women are defined as analogous to body in relation to the ruling mind: either obediently subjugated body (the wife), or sensual bodiliness in revolt against the governance of reason (the harlot). Women are assimilated into the definition of sin. The bodily principle is seen as intrinsically demonic; that the high road to salvation demands the spurning of bodily life altogether for the ascetical virgin state.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

In the book she co-authored with Eugene Bianchi, Ruether articulates her view of sin. It is the opposite of the traditional male view. It is not that woman is sinful, rather sexism is sin. Ruether proposes that

We must begin by understanding the nature of sexism as sin. If the fall consists in an alienation between man and God that takes social form as the alienated oppressive social relationship between persons, then sexism must be seen as the original and primary model for analyzing the state of the fall. This alienation begins in self-alienation, experienced as an alienation between the self and the body. The alienated oppressive relationship of man to woman is essentially a social projection of the self-alienation that translates certain initial biological advantages into a power relationship. This power relationship is totalized in social structures and modes of cultural formation that eliminates woman's autonomous personhood to define her solely in terms of male needs.<sup>53</sup>

The sin is that women became objects rather than persons, and it abuses God-given power by using that power to oppress someone or something else.

Twentieth-century minds have adopted a view of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as movements of high intellectual growth and development. Ruether presents another view of these historic eras.

When intellectual women of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment challenged the stereotype of female docility and invisibility, the paranoid myths of female viciousness continually surfaced. Much of the misogynist literature that poured out from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries must be seen as a continuous battle to repress the early stirrings of the feminist movement.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Radford Ruether, From Machismo to Mutuality: Woman-Man Liberation (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), pp. 103-104.

<sup>54</sup> Ruether, New Woman, p. 20.

The Renaissance and the Enlightenment repressed the rights of women, while post-French Revolutionary Europe sought to suppress women through romantic idealism. The French Revolution and the revolution in America threatened the fabric of Western civilization.

European thinkers went scrambling to recover bits and pieces of a threatened social order. The popularization of the Mariological tradition of spiritual femininity was an integral part of this reaction. Romanticism sought, simultaneously, to renew human sensibilities through contact with the mystical depths of nature from which rationalistic man had become alienated, and to compensate for the depersonalized world of industrialism and democracy that threatened the house of patriarchal society.<sup>55</sup>

The appeal of eighteenth-century romanticism was that it looked back to a 'golden age' when the world was more ordered.

It has already been mentioned that nineteenth-century feminism had serious racial and economic limitations. As Ruether expressed it,

the nineteenth-century women's movement allowed itself to remain limited to a civil rights and educational struggle. It backed away from a critique of socio-economic relations and cultural stereotypes of maleness and femaleness. It tried to build a women's movement on the Victorian doctrine of spiritual femininity. They argued that if women were the morally superior half of the race, they were needed all the more in the public sphere to 'moralize' society. But this effort to grasp the enemy's weapons ended in reinforcing traditional stereotypes of 'woman's place'." <sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

Not only did nineteenth-century feminism appeal to notions of romanticism, but it also appealed to a limited audience. Women who were white, Protestant, and middle-class gained the most from the quest for the vote, which was the central issue in nineteenth-century feminism. By buying into and supporting prevailing white-male attitudes about who should be allowed to vote, they aided in the oppression of others. Their argument for attaining the vote was that they would add to the number of white Protestants who shared the franchise.

Ruether believes that the Enlightenment influenced and supported their sexist (and racist) attitudes by appealing to J.J. Rousseau's motif of the noble savage. Those non-white and non-male were associated in the dualistic viewpoint with humanity's role of the 'noble savage'; the other was lifted up as having positive, primitive qualities which the ruling class no longer possessed. Their function in terms of the ruling class was to share these romanticized, primitive qualities with the very people who used their savage, carnal traits as the means of oppressing them. Explains Ruether, "the romantic agenda suggests the noble savage should remain in their soulful primitivity, so that they can nourish what the dominant group has lost."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 25.



Ruether calls for women to reject repressive romanticism. She says, "if white males need to recover their lost soul, women need to recover the rationality, autonomy, and self-definition which have been denied as tools of male needs and negations."<sup>58</sup>

Women cannot simply follow male models as they move from oppression to freedom. Ruether wants women to avoid hierarchial relationships. "Our model of relationships must cease to be hierarchial and become mutually supportive, a cooperative model of fellowship and life systems."<sup>59</sup>

Still, Ruether looks to feminine symbols as a means for women to recover the tools for survival. Ecclesiological images are present when we speak of the believing community as the bride of Christ and the mother of the faithful (Rev. 21:21). Another feminine symbol with theological imagery useful for women in the sophiological image. It is the feminine aspect of present wisdom (the Hebrew term is feminine 'ruah,' 'shekinah,' 'presence'; in Greek sophia means wisdom.) It is important to point out however, that in Latin and hence in the Western church, 'spiritus' is masculine and represents the third person to the trinity. The last feminine symbol Ruether mentions is the psyche or soul in relation to God. It meets God in mystical contemplation and communion.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

The three theological symbols of woman mentioned are useful in the study of Mariology. The study of the mother of Jesus has occupied much of Ruether's thought and work, but Mariology is not the issue here. What is at issue is whether women can claim elements of the Greek-Hebrew religious heritage. Ruether urges women not to be passive brides of Christ, but rather partners with him. She urges women to discover ways in which God is disclosed within themselves, and she challenges women to seek a contemplative relationship with the God that has been disclosed to them.

Ruether sees the use imagery of God-as-Father as improper imagery for the Creator because it has been used to support male elitism.

Theological images of God as father have been the sanctification of sexism and hierarchialism precisely by defining this relationship of God as father to humanity in a domination-subordination model and by allowing ruling-class males to identify themselves with this divine fatherhood in such a way as to establish themselves in the same kind of hierarchial relationship to women and lower classes.<sup>61</sup>

The argument of the continued use of exclusively male imagery when speaking of God has been to say "of course we know that God is not really male." What we know is reflected in how we image our concepts; and the prevailing image of God the Creator is that God is male. God is father, therefore male, therefore men have divine permission to dominate women.

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-45.

Ruether has a very strong opinion concerning those who say that God is not iterally male but then imagine God as a masculine figure:

What is involved, is nothing more or less than an idolatrous projection upon the nature of divine as the characteristics of the ruling sexual group upon society. This is more than just a matter of language and iconography. It also involves the fundamental way that the divine is imagined to act in relation to the world, modeled after social power-roles. The fundamental authority of the Biblical revelation is at stake. If this tradition is based on a symbol system that reflects the conquest of women by men, then its revelatory authority is tainted by social ideology. Its images of God, creation, redemption, and future hope are interwoven with characteristics oppressive to half the human race. Such characteristics are both evil and blasphemous, since they act as sactions of evil in the nature of the divine.<sup>62</sup>

God the father is not just a sexist notion, people cry, it is a Biblical concept supported by Jesus himself. It is true that Jesus spoke of God as father. Ruether does not deny that Jesus spoke in those terms. However, she wants to look again at the notion of God as father, and to perhaps seek new salvific images. Re-examination of the Judeo-Christian images of God as father

demands some supplementary insights, perhaps even a supplementary revelatory figure to redress the injustice of salvation through the exclusively male God and his son. We seek not only for ongoing fulfillment, but even a new dispensation to correct a past which does not give us enough basis for grace and hope.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>63</sup>Ruether, "Christology", p. 1.

We can and must examine the biblical roots of sexism.

Ruether believes that is is the idea of God as male which gives support to hierarchial systems in religion and in our secular life. She makes the point that Jesus did not perpetuate hierachies; rather he encouraged his followers to be servants. The Mary/Martha incident (Luke 10:38-42) illustrates that the serving of food is not the only way that women can be useful to society. Service is not servitude; it is giving in the way that Jesus modeled for us. Ruether explains that:

service implies autonomy and power used in behalf of others. Jesus calls the male disciples to service, makes Christ the model of service, not women or slaves. In the theology of incarnation in Philippians, Christ is seen as the pouring out of the power of God in service (Phil.2:6-7) Christ empties himself for others. Servitude is defined slavery or bondage. Service in Jesus' name has a different purpose for traditionally oppressed. Women, and the poor, are called forth out of their servitude to take positions of equality in discipleship.<sup>64</sup>

Servitude is oppressive; service has infinite value because it causes us to care about persons other than ourselves.

Paul is the biblical personality most appealing to persons who speak of women as not having leadership roles in the church. However a total reading of I Corinthians will show that women had leadership roles in the early church, and a complete reading of Paul's letters will show that many of his colleagues were women.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

Paul's concept of ministry is charismatic, established by the actual gifts and functions which a person exercises in the community. Women mentioned by Paul clearly exercise the functions which he describes as those of apostles, prophets, and teachers. Paul assumed, in fact, that women were vocal in the congregation as leaders of prayers and prophecy.<sup>65</sup>

Theologically, Paul was a radical; but he was also a social conservative. When persons have emphasized the conservatism of the apostles, it has been in order to support their own attitudes. Paul did not support hierarchies and was led by his idea of exchatology to believe that Christ would soon return so that slaves and other oppressed people would not need to change their social circumstances.

What the Christian community needs is a correct understanding of the apostle. Ruether suggests that

to understand Paul's theology correctly we must interpret the relationship of the eschatological breakthrough in Jesus, which abolished sex, class, and racist subjugation, not as a spiritual principle unconnected with social reality, but as a principle that must leaven social reality to create a just society where all peoples are seen as sisters, brothers, and friends, rather than as masters and servants.<sup>66</sup>

Paul's theology points toward a view of God as transcendent. Ruether also points out that it is the deutero-Pauline epistles which move from charismatic to patriarchal concepts of ministry. Passages such as I Timothy 2:11-12 indicate that women were active in the congregations of the early church.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Ruether, New Woman, p. 67.

The early church apparently gave more credence to deuterio-Pauline thought than to that which authentically Pauline (cf. Gal. 3:28). A male leadership class did arise in the church. Such a class found support in letters attributed to Paul, but no support of this nature could be found in the teachings of Jesus. Nevertheless, the church modeled itself according to what is perceived to be divine patriarchy "in order to establish itself in a hierarchial relationship to the Christian people."<sup>67</sup> There arose two groups in the church, a male clerical caste and a passive female caste which was related hierarchially to the male clergy. Ruether suggests that, as they developed, both the New Testament and its insistence on male Logos support the idea of exclusively male ministry.

But the New Testament image of women is incomplete. Ruether reminds us that

the New Testament world itself represents an emerging merger of several world views, patriarchal, apocalyptic, and gnostic. In the resulting merger, women end up with the worst of both worlds, subordinated as wife in the patriarchal order of nature, and repudiated as the image of carnal finitude in the world-denying quest for immortal life.<sup>68</sup>

Defenders of traditional theology often call Jesus a feminist because of his radical treatment of women. Ruether points out that "feminists such as Mary Daly would angrily

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>68</sup> Ruether, "Christology", p. 3.

repudiate this 'quest' for the feminist Jesus on the assumption that it still betrays a need for a masculine authority. Feminist revelation must stand on feminine experience."<sup>69</sup>

Feminist theology has a Christology different from that found in other liberation theologies. Ruether's particular Christology is one alternative to male-dominated thinking about the historical Jesus. It does not abandon the man Jesus, but rather looks at him in a way that is helpful to women and men.

This Christology does not exalt a new Lord that can be a model for new roles of power and domination. Nor does it bring together male and female in sexist patterns of complementarity. Rather it is Christology of conversion and social transformation. Alienated power is overthrown. Those who presently have and represent power are called to lay this power down in service. The subjugated are lifted up. They will inherit the earth in the new liberated kingdom of redemption. The despised of the present society lead the way into the kingdom. Men, leaders, even God repent of domination; servants, women, the poor are liberated from servitude. Jesus is not the Lord of Christendom, but the beginning of this alternative that still goes ahead of us, witnessing against its betrayal.<sup>70</sup>

As does Cone's, Ruether's Christology includes the themes of liberation and the full participation in society of the oppressed. Jesus will free persons from their bondage.

Ruether has a word to say to women who are ordained. She admonishes them not to get too completely entrenched in hierarchial systems.

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 4. (Note similarity to Cone's appeal to experience.)

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p.5.

Women who are ordained cannot be content to assimilate themselves into the clericalist mentality (i.e. maintaining the hierarchy between ministers and lay people), although many women are perfectly capable of doing so. Since the clergy-lay relationship has been modeled after sexist hierarchialism, women in the ministry must find it fundamentally incongruous to continue this psychology of lay-clergy relationships.<sup>71</sup>

Ruether does attempt to address more fully the issue of racism as it relates to sexism. More will be said about that relationship in the next chapter. Her use of class analysis indicates that she has an interest in socialism. She wants Western feminists to

take seriously a socialist dimension of the women's movement. Without creating the socioeconomic conditions for equality, the rights earned by feminists remain middle-class privileges for those women who are either childless or who can afford to pay a housekeeper and a nursemaid.<sup>72</sup>

Feminism must be inclusive of all women or it becomes an ideology which serves a limited constituency.

Domination extends not only to women, non-whites and all of the poor; Ruether says it also extends to nature. That is why we have found ourselves in a growing ecological crisis. Nature (the earth mother) is in need of liberation too.<sup>73</sup>

Many feminist Christians believe that persons must become androgynous in order for God's humanity and nature to

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<sup>71</sup>Ruether, New Woman, p. 80.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 179-180.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 204.



become once again responsibly balanced. Men, especially, they say, must get in touch with their femaleness. But Ruether sees a problem in the call for androgyny.

It is maleness which has caused all of the evils of the world. The romantic tradition declares that men need to get in touch with their feminine side, for femininity represents the better half. But the hidden message in romanticism is that women, therefore, should specialize in femininity and avoid the masculine traits of autonomy, intellectuality and self-determination. Women should nurture men in the feminist side, from which they have been alienated, while at the same time boosting their domination. In other words, here again androgyny turns out to be defined through an androcentricity which represents wholeness of humanity in women to make women the nurturers of wholeness which can appear only in males.<sup>74</sup>

Ruether is making the point that the kind of androgyny described is a variation of the noble savage theme: women, if they remain submissive and passive, can help men recover these sides of themselves.

Tuether believes that "the sins of the oppressed are not pride and aggression, but apathy and self-hatred."<sup>75</sup> What she wants is for women and other peoples to get angry at the way in which white-male-dominated culture makes absurd, racist, sexist and elitist assumptions about non-whites, women and the poor. She is urging the oppressed to recover their lost self-esteem because until they do they will continue to be oppressed.

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<sup>74</sup> Ruether, "Christology", p. 8.

<sup>75</sup> Bianchi and Ruether, From Machismo, p. 108.

All false and oppressive dualisms must be abolished before liberation can take place. Liberation takes all of the under-used qualities of both men and women to be called forth. Ruether insists that

not only must women be empowered to think and act and men be put in touch with their receptive and nurturing powers. But the processes by which these qualities have been related to each other must be transformed so that activity is no longer a function of domination, and receptivity no longer a function of dependency. Theologically this vision is called redemption. It is the reconciliation of humanity with itself, the reconciliation of people with each other and humanity to nature. But humanity can be reconciled with God only if God is converted from 'His' patriarchy to become the ground of reciprocity in creation.<sup>76</sup>

Ruether never attempts to deny the maleness of Jesus. What she does attempt to do is to say that neither God nor Christ needs to be limited to male images, especially if such images are the basis on which oppression is built. Her importance to feminist theology is that she brings a rational, historical, radical and christian perspective to the field of feminist theology.

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<sup>76</sup>Ruether, "Christology", p. 9.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## A PERSONAL CONSTRUCTION

Theresa Hoover has said: "To be a woman, black, and active in religious institutions in the American scene is to labor under triple jeopardy."<sup>1</sup> Black women in America live in a climate that values maleness, whiteness, and secularism. The task of giving a strong witness to Christian faith is a difficult one for black women. Yet it is a task with which black Christian women must be concerned. The triple jeopardy about which Hoover speaks can be overcome if black women will take up the challenge and offer their own words about their theological grounding.

What follows is a personal statement on theology. It is written from the perspective of a black Christian feminist who is deeply concerned about the way the church has aided in the oppression of blacks and women in the United States.

Black and feminist theology represent similar movements which call us out of oppression and into liberation. They are not the same, but they do have several points in common. As Pauli Murray has said:

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<sup>1</sup>Theresa Hoover, "Black Woman and the Churches: Triple Jeopardy" in Gayraud S. Wilmore, James H. Cone (eds.) Black Theology: A Documentary History: 1966-1979 (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 377.

Growing out of parallel liberation movements, their commitment is to radical political and social change. They do not attempt to present systematic theologies; their purpose is to offer critical reflection upon Christian faith in the light of the particular experience of blacks and women respectively in their struggles to abolish the injustices which have kept these groups in subordination. Both are strongly critical of the Christian church which they find deeply implicated in the perpetuation of both white racism and the oppression of women.<sup>2</sup>

These movements are spoken of as theologies. They continue to operate from within the Christian camp. And they have offered their critiques of white-male dominated traditional theology from within the community of faith.

Chapter One of this essay lays out the problem being addressed here. Women and blacks are oppressed in both religious and secular society. The discrimination against women and blacks because of their race and/or gender goes on daily. Both blacks and women have been treated as second-class citizens within the church. The previous chapter mentioned the way in which the Christian gospel was intended to pacify black slaves. Often they were pacified; but they were also set afire by the messages of freedom and hope they heard from Christian preachers. Throughout Judeo-Christian history, women have been regarded as the source of corruption and evil (cf. previous chapter on Ruether). But they have also been preachers, teachers, and martyrs for the faith.

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<sup>2</sup>Pauli Murray, "Black Theology and Feminist Theology: A Comparative View", Anglican Theological Review, LX (January 1978), 3.

Neither women nor blacks have been dealt with adequately by traditional theology. Blacks and women have had to write theology from their own perspectives. Their writings fall under the umbrella of theologies of liberation. That is, they write as people who know what it is to be oppressed in society. They also write as persons who know that, as Christians, they are not bound by the racist and sexist rules that others would use to continue to enslave them. Black women have found themselves misrepresented by black men and white women who have written liberation theology in North America, almost as if they alone are the victims of oppression. Black theology and feminist theology have finally begun to dialogue with each other, but the conversation has been for the most part between black men and white women. Not until recently have black feminist voices been raised and acknowledged within theological circles. One of those voices is presented here. My thoughts are based on the Bible, and writings in feminist, black and Latin American theologies of liberation. What follows is my own word about God as that word relates to Christian, black and feminist concerns.

I believe that God is both the creator and judge of all humanity. By creator, I mean that God set in motion all of life, providing the means for there to be order in the midst of chaos. Humanity has distorted the order God intended by making its' own self-interests primary and by treating God's will as secondary. To speak of God as judge is to

suggest that God has the wisdom, power, and compassion to decide whether our actions and attitudes are motivated solely out of concern for both God and neighbor.

God wills liberation for humanity. Freedom from oppression has both political and spiritual significance. The word received by Moses from God to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt was a political and a religious word. It was political because the word of God's will for the Hebrews' freedom challenged the ruling powers of Egypt and set Hebrews marching out of slavery and into freedom. The word was religious because the people who left slavery in Egypt did so because they believed that they were under the protection of Yawheh. The God who through Moses brought the Hebrews out of Egypt willed the liberation of both the Hebrews and the Egyptians. The Pharaohs has misused the freedom given to them by God by restricting the freedom of others. By making the Hebrews slaves, the Pharaohs had violated God's sovereignty. They enslaved persons whom God had created to be free and by so doing they enslaved themselves to their own desire to be gods. The word which came to Ramses II was: "Let my people go" so that Yawheh could be served in the wilderness (Ex.7:16). The Pharaoh could say 'yes' or 'no' to Moses. He was free to make a choice. His choice was whether or not he would yield to God's will and release those who were oppressed. The witness to God's will for liberation has relevance for us today. The choices faced by men and women

who today oppress others is not very different. They too have to decide if they will say yes to God's will for liberation or whether they will ignore God's will and instead yield to their own and continue to oppress people.

God is active in human history; on that point Cone is quite correct. God acts through humanity toward that will which is for the liberation of humanity from oppressive conditions. God has created humanity to be free. What God will is that human beings live lives of God-given dignity and worth. The attainment of dignity is especially important for black people in America, as they have endured centuries of humiliation and dehumanization in this country. Deotis Roberts has said: "The first order of business for black theology is to enable black people to affirm their manhood, their dignified nature, which is God-given and not given or taken away by any man, black or white."<sup>3</sup> Roberts statement illustrates the problem being dealt with here. Certainly black theology is concerned with the enabling of black people. However, black women have no manhood to affirm. Black women need to affirm their dignified womanhood in whatever way they define it.

Cone is also correct when he says that God stands with the weak and helpless, the oppressed of the land. God

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<sup>3</sup>J. Deotis Roberts, Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), p.101.

does stand with the weak and helpless. But God also stands with the strong and powerful, continually showing them that God demands justice and obedience from all of creation. The stand that God makes with the oppressed is the stand toward liberation. God reminds them that they are created in God's own image and that their lives do have dignity. The stand God makes with those who oppress others enables them to let go of the power they have misused in controlling others. God offers grace and freedom to both the oppressed and the oppressors by calling them into liberation from their particular kind of bondage.

The oppressed and the oppressor are both enslaved by the misuse of the freedom given by God. And they both need to hear God's call to freedom from bondage.

Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests that what is needed is a new Christology. We need a view of Jesus which is non-patriarchal and which emphasizes service over servitude (cf. previous chapter). Jesus offers us a view of what absolute commitment and obedience to God can be.

Jesus is the revelation of God. Through Jesus we become aware of God's will for humanity. That will has been identified as liberation. The gospels record many instances of Jesus speaking God's acts of liberation to people who were bound by law (the woman caught in adultery, John 7:53-8:11); by traditional prejudices (Zaccheus, Luke 19:2-10); and by their own sin (the woman at Jacob's well, John 4:7-38). These



people and others were called out of bondage and into freedom by Jesus as the revelation of God's love for humanity.

In Jesus we also see how God's nature is revealed through a human being. Jesus shows us God's compassion, and God's concern that human dignity be preserved. Jesus was concerned about people in every aspect of their lives: he urged that hungry people be fed, that sick people be healed, and that bound people be freed, and that all people realize that they all have access to God. Jesus' concern for the physical and spiritual needs of people reflects God's concern for people.

It is through Jesus that God's grace is offered to humanity. It is through faith in Jesus that we are justified (Romans 3:21-24). It is God who justifies faithful humanity. And with the justification comes the assurance of God's grace in the midst of our bondage, whether that bondage is the bondage of being one of the oppressed or one of the oppressors.

Jesus' ministry provides a model for us. He was a spokesman for God, that is, Jesus was a prophet speaking God's word to all who would hear him. As with the Old Testament prophets, Jesus offered those he encountered the opportunity to respond to God's call for justice, mercy, and freedom in their own lives. Jesus followed the Old Testament prophets in the way he challenged both people and systems. The challenge was always that people and systems respect the dignity God intends for humanity. Jesus was not concerned with

whether people had much earthly power. Rather his concern was that people be servants of one another. Jesus was also concerned that people see themselves as they really are, without masks and pretense. He called people to change their lives from self-centeredness to God-centeredness.

Our ministry is not different from the ministry of Jesus; only the context for ministry is different. We too have the prophetic task, we speak as agents of God to the people and systems that benefit from oppression, urging them always to seek that which brings about freedom.

Jesus has redeemed us. His life was given for ours. But his total ministry did not point to the cross. His ministry was one of service, even if service to God and to humanity meant death.

Jesus understood what God required of humanity and through his death, he offers us that same understanding. Redemption by Jesus means that we are freed from a misunderstanding of what God requires. We can, as Micah 6:8 suggests, do justice, love mercy, and talk humbly with God because Jesus has showed us how, even at the cost of his own life.

Because Jesus has died for us, our lives have taken on meaning. Redemption means that we are saved from empty lives lived in isolation from others. Micah 6:8 becomes not only a requirement of God to us, but a way of every day living. One cannot do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God in isolation from an oppressed community which needs to hear

that they are loved by God.

Redemption does not just save us from something, it also saves us to something. We are saved to the service of others, confronting oppressive systems with the need for change. We are also saved to personal service, giving up parts of ourselves out of compassion for others.

Redemption means that we understand that this life is not ultimate. The resurrection is an important event in the continuing story of God's triumph over oppression. Suffering and death are not ultimate. Even though death and suffering are real, Christian hope is not contained within the confines of time or human experience. Both time and human experience are within the realm of God's power.

My own experience of salvation is that with it comes the assurance that my relationship with God will last in this life and beyond it (Romans 8:31-39). Galatians 4 suggests that believers are heirs of God. Assuming that Paul is right, I have an inheritance from God which frees me from oppressive restraints. I am able to say "No" to inhuman definitions of what I am; racist and sexist definitions of who I am are absolutely rejected. Assurance and inheritance in both life and death means that God's presence is with me through my faith in Jesus Christ who is both the servant of God and the risen Lord who has conquered the finality of death.

The Holy Spirit has traditionally been identified as the third part of the male trinity, yet it like God, is

neither male and female. The Holy Spirit is the breath of life, the "pneuma" (spirit) which enables life to go forward. The Holy Spirit is the comforter about which Jesus spoke (John 14:15-24).

The Holy Spirit provides us with the energy to exist in the midst of profound suffering as well as in good times. And it provides us with the energy for praxis when action is life threatening (Luke 4:16-29) or when the benefits of praxis are not immediately obvious (Matthew 25:31-46).

The Holy Spirit is as Jesus promised always with us, leading us away from oppressive fears which bind us and into that freedom which allows us to stand courageously with the powers of God's liberation.

God has created humanity to be free and equal to one another. It is humanity's misuse of the freedom given to them by God that causes oppression. True freedom through Christ liberates persons to the point that oppressive restraints become intolerable.

God's offer of grace to humanity is not compulsory. It is offered through faith in Christ. Persons are free to accept or reject God's offer of grace. We need to realize that there are implications in whichever decision is made. Acceptance of God's offer of grace means that one has accepted the assurance, security, and courage which comes with faith in Christ. One who has accepted God's grace need never fear that he or she is alone. God has promised to be with those

who put their faith in God.

Rejection of God's offer of grace means that one will live in doubt, pessimism, and despair. From the Christian point of view, life without the grace of God means that one must be dependent on human resources more than on divine resources. When we live without the grace, we live without knowing God as the creator, judge, and guardian of our lives. We live without the assurance which comes from faith.

Even those who have accepted God's grace fall. All of human creation is sinful, but Christians believe that we are justified even as we are sinners. Sin can be viewed as that which separates one from God and/or one's neighbor. Oppressive actions or attitudes are sinful because they are dehumanizing. They violate God's will for human freedom. God created the world in order. Oppression is sinful because it violates the order which God intended.

One falls into sinfulness any time he or she to make herself or himself co-equal with God by attempting to define humanity according to racist and/or sexist attitudes. People become so proud of what they are that they feel free to denigrate all who are not like themselves. Such pride leads to the sin of selfishness wherein every thing is seen and measured according to one's own needs. And as one's own needs become the measure of acceptability people become disobedient to God, replacing the divine will with their own.

Sin is bondage to a will other than God's and as such can be eliminated by yielding to God's will. From a liberation perspective, a sinful condition is in existence wherever there is the attempt to make one's prejudices operative for all humanity. Any vision of humanity which does not recognize that humanity is created in the divine image is cause for outrage.

One affirms a humanity made in God's image not to negate others but to recover that common humanity that can unite us with others. Anger in the service of love and justice places all oppressive systems under judgment.<sup>4</sup>

Victims of oppression are not exempt from sin. They participate in sin by using their victim status as a means of avoiding action. They allow themselves to become so paralyzed by their oppression that they lose the desire to rid themselves of their oppression.

Another way the victims of oppression fall into sin is by using their oppression as the means of oppressing others. They are guilty of the sin of pride. Often oppressed groups believe that vengeance accompanies freedom. This is not so. As groups come to terms with racism and sexism, victims of these two forms of oppression must remember that they also face the judgment of God. They will not be justified in the

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<sup>4</sup>Eugene Bianchi and Rosemary Radford Ruether, From Machismo to Mutuality: Man-Woman Liberation (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 109.

oppression of others. The victims of oppression still need to hear and to do the will of God.<sup>5</sup>

What is necessary for liberation is that persons living in oppressive conditions become involved in praxis. Praxis is necessary because, while God intends humanity to be free, there are those who would claim God's freedom for themselves while denying that freedom to others. Though they go about it in different ways, black, feminist, and Latin American theologies support the idea of political and religious praxis. Those who are oppressed know that their oppression will not end through their politely petitioning their oppressors. Oppressed people understand power enough to know that power is not given up easily. They also know that oppressed persons do not just ask for the rights they have been denied; they demand those rights. Praxis is a vital part of liberation theology. Theologies of liberation are sound challenges to the established religious order. Action is one means, along with faithfulness to God and the gospel, of providing oppressed people with the freedom others prevent them from having.

Action is intentional involvement toward the end of changing and transforming the existing oppressive systems and institutions. In praxis the oppressed envision not only a future for themselves and the political order in which they live, but a different image

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<sup>5</sup> James H. Cone, God of the Oppressed (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 208.

of themselves as subjects with freedom, power, and with the present.<sup>6</sup>

Humanity must understand that if God's grace is accepted, people act out of faith, concern, and service. We do not give too much importance to the self. Then true reconciliation can take place between the victims of racism and sexism and their oppressors. A black feminist perspective could aid in the attainment of reconciliation. Usually whenever oppressed people begin to press for their rights, their oppressors begin to cry for reconciliation. Reconciliation is important. True reconciliation could take place if a black feminist perspective in theology were taken seriously. Taking a black feminist perspective seriously could bring about reconciliation because, when true reconciliation takes place, the oppressors will have recognized the truth of God's human creation. Humanity has been created in equality. It would mean that theology had found its way into the concrete experience of humanity. Reconciliation means telling the truth to each other. Black women will have to give up the false notions that have been aids to their oppression. They have internalized lies told to them by people having a stake in their oppression. Reconciliation requires turning away from the myths and lies which divide humanity.

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<sup>6</sup>Beth Glick-Rieman, "A Feminist View of Liberation Theology" Brethren Life and Thought, XXII, 3 (Summer 1977), 149.



The church is the whole body of Christ. By union with Christ through our baptism, we become one with him. Because Christ said "no" to oppression we must say that same word to all persons or institutions that would limit another's freedom through oppression. The church is also a community of believers. It is comprised of people who have joined together because of their faith in Christ.

All members of the church are not of a single mind. If all discrimination against women were to end, racism would still exist. And if all racism were to end, sexism would still exist. Even members of the church are vulnerable to prejudicial pride. Still, the church is led by one Lord, Jesus Christ. Faith in him is the foundation on which the church is built. And the Lord calls people to be faithful and free of oppressive conditions. When oppressive conditions exist, the church's foundation cannot be firm.

The church is a group of people with a witness. The witness of the church can be both positive and negative. The church's positive witness is revolutionary. Major Jones says:

the church has sponsored the revolutionary process by preaching a message that sets things in motion by stirring up the imagination, arousing new expectations, and stimulating a crusading zeal to translate hopes, whose realization some would postpone for heaven above, into the social structure of this world. The simple fact of preaching the gospel is itself like putting sticks of explosives into the social structure.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Major Jones, Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 91.

Black women can be revolutionary when they treat racist and sexist structures as unacceptable. By declaring the unacceptability of such structures and by offering alternatives, black women can be agents for change within the church. Black women will provide a presence in the churches that cannot be ignored. They will present a voice that must be heard. They can be revolutionaries by reminding the church that any institution that perpetuates oppression is without the will of God.

The Church's witness is negative whenever it gives support to people and institutions that support oppression. Any time the church does not challenge those who would bind others, it is giving a negative witness to the world. Black Christian feminism represents a change in the way people participate in the life of the church. Racial and sexual barriers will be broken down, as people act out of love for Christ rather than out of concern for only themselves. The presence of black women in positions of leadership in the church will force people, male and female, black and white to deal with the issues which support racism and sexism in the church. Groups within the church will be forced by the presence of black women to come to terms with racism and sexism.

One of the functions of the church is to offer support to its members. Such support has been traditional in the black church. But the support given to women in the black church and in black theology has been lacking. Black women

have not often had a leading voice in the black church or in black theology.

Black women must make their presence felt in black and in feminist theological circles. Only black women can speak for black women. The question is why have black women not been engaged in doing theology from a black feminist perspective? Jacquelyn Grant suggests an answer: "In examining black theology it is necessary to make one of two assumptions: 1. either black women have no place in the enterprise, or 2. black men are capable of speaking for us. Both of these assumptions are false and need to be discarded."<sup>8</sup> Often black women are ignored because black men assume that they alone speak for the black community. Such false belief hurts black men and black women because the black community is diminished when a segment of the community attempts to speak for the whole.

The injustice of sexism does not occupy a high place in black theology's agenda. Grant makes this point:

The fact that black theology does not include sexism specifically as one of those injustices is all too evident. It suggests that the theologians do not understand sexism to be one of the oppressive realities of the black community.<sup>9</sup>

Sexism is one of the realities of the black community and also of the black church. To admit grudgingly that sexism

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<sup>8</sup> Jacquelyn Grant, "Black Theology and the Black Woman," in Wilmore and Cone, p. 420.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 427.

exists and yet to say that it must take second place to the issue of racism is simply wrong. Racism and sexism are both important issues within the church. Both need to be eliminated if the word of God is to be proclaimed in a liberating way.

Black churches tend to be patriarchal: men reign and rule. When liberation themes are heard, the concerns of women are seldom dealt with; they are trivialized or ignored altogether. The black church must realize that all of its members, male and female, have to be included in the liberation of black people. The credibility of the black church as it seeks to attain liberation is at stake. Grant says:

If the liberation of women is not proclaimed, the church's proclamation cannot be about divine liberation. If the church does not share in the liberation struggle of black women, its liberation is not authentic. If women are oppressed, the church cannot possibly be a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality for the gospel cannot be real in that context.<sup>10</sup>

It is Grant's contention that women have not been so much the essential backbone of local congregations as they have been in the background of the church. Their function is to be present in the pew, in the nursery, the Church School, and the choir. Sometimes women will serve on important committees; more often than on a committee however, they are likely to serve in the kitchen. The point was made in an earlier chapter that women have been too much church members and not enough church leaders. In many black congregations, not only

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 423.

are women barred from ordination, they are even barred from entering the pulpit area. Such exclusiveness is inexcusable and presumptuous. It does not reflect God's creation of everyone in the Creator's image.

What black feminist theology seeks is transformation of the church. David Tracy's use of Friedrich Nietzsche's term 'transvaluation of values' is useful here. It is concerned that Christianity move beyond cultural restrictions and ourselves so that we might fully discover our humanity.

Only when Christianity does transvalue all values, only when the Christian understanding of human possibility is radical self-overcoming, a gift from a gracious God, does the real Christian vision of what it means to be human begin.<sup>11</sup>

God calls persons to cast aside the internalized notions of what others have said they are. Humanity is told to move beyond the concern with living up to human value, which includes an inordinate concern with the self, and to think on what it means to live as if created by God and to live as if God acts through humanity. What had been valued, will cease to be so important.

Transformation demands a displacement of one set of values along with, indeed because of, its replacement by the new and gracious possibility decisively represented in Christ Jesus and represented anew in the word and sacrament of the Christian church.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>David Tracy, "Christian Faith and Radical Equality", Theology Today, XXXIV, 4 (January 1978), 370.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 371.

Exclusively white, male images and values must be displaced if the church is to truly reflect all of God's creation, and if the totality of God's human creation is to really share in the ministry of the church. Patriarchal systems deny that all of God's creation is equally valuable.

The church also functions in that it shares the word and will of God. The biblical witness is one of the ways the church shares in proclaiming the word and will of God. The words of equality and liberation found in the Bible must be heard.

It must be noted that supporters of feminist theology and supporters of black theology do not believe the same things about the Bible. Many feminist theologians view the Bible as a book designed with a perspective supportive of patriarchy. Rarely does the Bible speak a word of support for women as women, they believe. Black theologians look at the stories of the Hebrews being brought out of slavery through the grace and participation of God, and to their own history as slaves. From the biblical account of slaves being led to freedom, they conclude that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is a book which is concerned with bringing about the freedom of the oppressed.

There are some feminist theologians who have seen in the biblical stories of Jesus a model which persons might look toward as they seek liberation. Jesus offered a view of God which transcends patriarchy and male dominance. Beth

Glick-Rieman says:

He modeled a life-style of mutuality, interdependence, and supportive community. He lived in respectful and appreciative awareness of his relationship with nature. Jesus liberated the images of God to include the attitudes that were traditionally accepted as feminine: compassion, care, nurture, and emotionality.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus does serve as a model for some feminists (though other feminists would reject the claim of Jesus as a role model).

As a Christian, I believe that the biblical witness of God's liberating power does have relevance for women. Women can hear and be enabled to act upon the liberating power of God as that power is presented in the Bible.

There are also women who find little or no support in the local church. The same is often true for blacks who are members of predominately white denominations. Local churches are often a distortion of biblical intention. James Cone has said: "when we permit ourselves to experience the root meaning of the biblical message and to hear the claims it lays upon all who would be Christian in this world, then we will see the radical difference between the established churches and the truth of the gospel."<sup>14</sup> What is true about the gospel we receive from the Bible is that it calls persons into freedom out of every form of bondage. If local churches

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<sup>13</sup>Glick-Rieman, p. 149.

<sup>14</sup>James H. Cone, "Christian Faith and Political Praxis" (paper prepared for the October 1977 Mexico City Conference on "Encounter of Theologians"), p. 3.

continue to perpetuate bondage out of a mistaken belief that the way things are is the way they ought to be, they are being unfaithful to the intent of the gospel.

A gospel which calls for the liberation of persons cannot limit itself in terms of sexual gender. Both males and females must seek to proclaim Christ's gospel. In the book he co-edited with Gayraud Wilmore, Cone says:

If the biblical message is one of liberation, then a ministry based on that message must be creative and liberating. There is no place for differences in the roles of men and women in ministry. God has created man and woman as equals, that is, as co-pastors in the service of freedom. Therefore, whatever differences are found in present-day churches arise from human sin, that is the will of men to dominate and control women. If we black men and women shall achieve freedom, we must do it together. We cannot support a subordinate ministry for women and also claim to be for the liberation of the oppressed.<sup>15</sup>

The Bible's message from the Old Testament to the New includes the theme of liberation. No race, no gender, no social class is to dominate another. God has created humanity to be free. Humanity decides whether or not to accept the freedom God offers.

Tradition also plays an important role in the way the church has shared in God's will and word. Women and blacks have not always been treated well in the larger church. What is positive about the black church is that it has often been

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<sup>15</sup>James H. Cone, "New Roles in Ministry: A Theological Appraisal" in Wilmore and Cone, p. 395.



the only place where black women and men could be free of the racist forces which surrounded them.

There is no female "church" as such. Women within the Christian church have begun to look on the traditions in the Bible and in Christian history which have not supported patriarchal systems and which recognize that women are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). And they have begun to look outside traditional Christianity for systems which give support to women as persons.

Finally the church needs to reflect the will and the people of God. In order for persons to realize that everyone is created in the image of God, the church must be faithful, obedient, prophetic, inclusive, active, and gracious. God has called us to be faithful in word, deed, and thought. There is no place for oppression in the church of Christ.

Nor is there any place for disobedience. To be obedient to God is to seek to do God's will at all times. To do God's will is to proclaim God's word of liberation to those who are captive. If God's will is for liberation, then the church must be prophetic in proclaiming that liberation. With the prophetic word, there also comes a word of hope. The hope is that black women will play a role in the elimination of oppression from the church and from the rest of society.

There is a role for black women to play. The issue is how black women are to impact the church. Ordination is one way, but it is not the only means of impact. "The black

church-woman must come to a point of challenging both her sisters in other denominations and the clerical-male hierarchy in her own. In many ways she has been the most oppressed and the least vocal. She has given the most and gotten the least."<sup>16</sup> The church must be inclusive of all its members. The black church-woman needs to address her brothers in the pulpit. Women have been excluded from many black pulpits just because they are women. They have been prevented from speaking from black pulpits because the men who restrict them have found biblical support for their position, often citing the words against women having authority in the church as found in I Timothy 2:11-12. But they ignore Paul's words in Galatians 3:26-28, which says that through our baptism into Christ, we are neither "Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female". It is a selective reading of scripture which prevents women from entering some pulpits. Cone makes a telling point: "While many black ministers have little difficulty rejecting Paul's command to slaves to be obedient to their masters as a valid rejection of black slavery, they seem incapable of taking a similar stance in relation to Paul's comments about women."<sup>17</sup> To read the Bible with an eye which rejects slavery but condones sexist objectification is to believe that the

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<sup>16</sup> Hoover, p. 386.

<sup>17</sup> J.H. Cone, "Introduction" in Wilmore and Cone, p. 365.

Bible does not call persons to complete liberation. Of course black men and black women need to be involved in the struggles to end racism. But they must also work together to end sexism in the black community. The whole black community can be enhanced by men and women working together.<sup>18</sup> Pulpits that are open to women are representative of the inclusiveness which the body of Christ must demonstrate. Inclusive freedom means that women will be included in the ministry and leadership of the church.

Black Christian feminism will change the way the church looks at itself because the church will achieve a vision of what a truly inclusive institution can be. Black women who have known what it is to be excluded from the leadership structures of the church need to bring a sense of inclusive freedom and responsibility to the church.

The church is called to be active and gracious. The God who creates humanity to live in dignity, and in freedom, who calls persons to hear the biblical message of liberation, is also the God who calls persons to action. Activity in God's name will often involve struggle. The struggle is exciting because of the creative revolutionary hope which is attendant to it. "Creation is a constant process of renewal from within. Each day is alive with new possibilities."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Glick-Rieman, p. 152.

The hope is that God-given freedom which is humanity's will be realized. God's kingdom will come on earth, even as it is in heaven. And with God's reign will come the establishment of God's justice, and the assurance that human dignity is preserved.

## CONCLUSION

The issues of black and feminist theologies of liberation cannot be treated as if they were either/or issues. It is ludicrous to say that black women must choose black rights or women's rights. Each issue is important. What faces the church of God is not an either/or situation. There is a condition of both/and operating here. Black women do suffer the dual humiliation of racism and sexism within and without the church.

The dual oppression exists because white male-dominated society has built a power base upon the subjugation of others. The gospel which Jesus preached is the gospel of redemption, grace, and freedom. We are subjects of one another, serving our neighbor but not living in subjugation to him or her. We do not live in isolation from one another. Jesus called persons to be in community with each other. Community building means tearing down the walls which divide us and recognizing that sexism and racism, along with other "isms", are not consistent with the gospel of Jesus. There is much work to be done. If there were no sexism, racism would still exist. And if racism were to be eliminated from society, sexism would nevertheless still exist.

A black feminist perspective on Christianity is revolutionary because it calls people to change radically the way they perceive themselves and each other. God is with

the oppressed as well as the oppressor, freeing both of them from the bonds which restrict them to lives of humiliation and pride. Black women have to realize that God created them in the divine image and that God's grace includes infinite valuation and healing love and grace toward all.

## APPENDIX

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## MERGER?: A SIMULATION GAME

## I. THE GAME

The purpose of this game is to address the tension which exists between oppressive stereotypes which have to do with race and sex and the efforts at reaching reconciliation and mutuality which exists between race and sex. Christians have long struggled with whether the prejudgment of one because of race, that is, racism is in accord with the gospel. Many Christians believe that the church needs to also look at whether pre-judging one because of sexual gender, that is, sexism is in accord with the gospel. There is tension between persons who seek to find a way to grapple with racism and sexism in a way that declares God's desire that humanity be reconciled and in a way that lifts up the belief that we are all made in the image of God.

It is hoped that this game will help people within the local church, especially church leaders, to understand how it is that they participate in and therefore perpetuate a total system of oppression. By its omission of non-whites and/or women from leadership roles supported racist and sexist systems which are not in accord with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This game is intended to help persons become aware of the issues involved so that they might become better attuned to the affects of their beliefs and actions on the church at large.



The intention of the game is that those who play it might be led to a new vision of humanity which goes beyond stereotypes. A further intention is that playing the game will lead people toward a commitment to action which will eliminate sexism and racism from the church.

#### Why a Simulation Game?

Simulation games provide a means of learning. They are play. Adults often believe that they have to leave play behind them with the onset of maturity. They feel that they now must enter "real life". Simulations offer a chance to deal with real issues, but they are not real life. Games are communications tools. People who might not otherwise talk to each other will communicate with each other in the context of a game. Simulation games urge people to use their imagination as they involve themselves in a game. These games are useful too in that they provide a means by which people can begin to understand how religious or political issues affect their day to day lives. Our game is concerned with helping people to become aware of the results of sexism and racism in our society. In a simulation game, people can "play a role" and try to come to some understanding of opinions which are different than the ones they hold.

## II. WHAT'S NEEDED FOR THE GAME

one large meeting room  
two smaller caucus rooms  
pencils, paper  
name tag (this is the name assigned for the game)  
description of the assigned character  
lists of all the persons playing the game (characters names)  
descriptions of the churches  
descriptions of the pastors

NOTE: NAME TAG SHOULD BE DIFFERENT COLOR FOR EACH CHURCH

## III. SETTING FOR THE GAME

This game can be played in a variety of settings. It can be played with non-whites or whites since a great deal of role playing is built into the game. Possible settings can include an all church retreat or a leadership retreat; it can include a local church which is trying to raise its consciousness about issues of oppression; and it can include a group which is trying to work through a controversial issue in the church.

THE GOAL OF THE GAME IS TO GET THE PLAYERS TO VOTE  
YES OR NO TO MERGER BETWEEN TWO CONGREGATIONS

## IV. BACKGROUND (EACH PARTICIPANT IN THE GAME WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THE BACKGROUND OF THE TWO CHURCHES)

First Church was at one time a large (800 members) congregation situated in downtown Los Angeles. At its peak, the church had an average weekly attendance of 400 members with a growing, well attended Sunday School. There were

also very active fellowship groups. But for the last 10 years, there has been a decline in attendance and in church growth. Their pastor, the Rev. Ms. Smith, believes that she has worked out a method which will involve a serious change for the church, but which will nevertheless allow the church to continue in some form. Presently there are about 150 people who support the church financially and about 80 who attend services regularly (although they are not the same 80 every Sunday). This congregation is white.

Third Street Church is a growing black congregation which has seen a steady though not phenomenal increase in growth for the past three years. They are now outgrowing their facility. Meeting in a rented office building, they are now at the point of needing additional Sunday school space and meeting rooms. Their pastor, the Rev. Mr. Johnson, has been in conference with the Rev. Ms. Smith and they are about to present their plan to members of their congregations, and to persons in leadership positions within those congregations.

The pastors, and other church leaders, and members of the two congregations will go to a denominationally owned conference ground to decide this question:

SHOULD FIRST CHURCH AND THIRD STREET CHURCH MERGE INTO ONE CONGREGATION? (remember, the goal of the game will be to vote YES or NO to the question of merger)

While this design of the game was put together for a large group, it can be played with smaller groups of people. With some changes, as few as ten people can play this game. In making modifications, roles requiring three or four persons can be reduced to a single person playing that role. This game was put together with the congregational structure of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in mind. That too can be changed. Other characters can be added.

Va. Role Descriptions (every player will get this list of role descriptions. Those players who are crucial to the game and therefore should not be eliminated will have an asterik (\*) before their names.

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES ARE THE PASTORS TO BE ELIMINATED FROM THE GAME

#### FIRST CHURCH

\*Lydia Jones - president of the women's group  
 Martha Ford - member of the women's group  
 Joan Case - member of the women's group  
 Ron Zane - member of the congregation  
 Judy Matthews - choir director  
 Howard Dotson - head custodian  
 \*Michael Olson - youth representative  
 \*Harold Kemp - member of the congregation  
 Diane Graven - member of the congregation  
 Leonard Gray - member of the congregation  
 \*Laura Norton - chairperson of the finance committee  
 Ellen Andrews - member of the board  
 \*David Thornton - Sunday School superintendent  
 Thelma Lindsay - elder

#### THIRD STREET CHURCH

\*Rober Mack - elder  
 Arthur Lane - new member of the congregation  
 Janice Shones - president of the young adult group

Raymond Ball - chairperson of the board of elders  
 \*Mary Clark - president women's group  
 Carl Hill - Sunday School teacher  
 \*Teri Adkins - youth representative  
 Thec Hall - deacon  
 \*George Butler - elder  
 Sam Maxwell - member of the congregation  
 Alice Merton - member of the congregation  
 Bea Fraser - member of the congregation  
 Lois Clark - member of the congregation  
 Gilbert James - member of the congregation  
 \*Henry Walker - member of the congregation  
 Ruth Fine - member of the congregation  
 Edgar Purvis - member of the board

#### GAME LEADERS PLEASE NOTE:

These names are only suggestions - please feel free to change the names and to adapt the descriptions given here

Also, the players should receive as they enter the room where the joint meetings will take place the following:

1. a list of all the players
2. descriptions of the pastors
3. name tags with their assigned names (include name of church)
4. a paragraph stating the full description of their role.

The following list can be cut or copied so that individuals can have a copy of their roles fully described.

- Vb. The descriptions which follow are to be given only to those men and women assuming these roles; these roles can be cut out or copied and given to the person who assumes the role.

Lydia Jones (First Church). She has been a member of First Church for thirty years. The women's group has finally convinced the worship committee to change some of the language used in worship so that God is not always referred to as he, him, or Father. The issue of language is important for her because she believes that men and women are made in the image of God and that the language of the worship service ought to reflect the belief that God can be spoken about in terms other than male. She has fought male domination in the life of the church's leadership and is afraid that merger will create a church which allows men to take over the church's leadership roles. She is threatened by the proposed merger.

Martha Ford (First Church). She has been active in the women's group for a short time. She is a strong feminist and shares the concern about the use of language which clearly addresses both men and women.

Joan Case (First Church). She is a forty year member of the church. She and her children have grown up in the church and she remembers it as a thriving congregation. Her primary concern about the merger is whether there will develop a single women's group or whether there will be one white group and one black group. She would like for there to be one single women's group, if merger occurs, but she is undecided about whether the merger should take place.

Robert Mack (Third Street Church). He takes his role as spiritual leader of the church seriously. He is an articulate man who has no formal education. He is against the merger because he feels that his position as a church leader will be affected.

Arthur Lane (Third Street). He is a recent member of the church. His concern is that the style of worship at First Church is too "dry" and that their style of worship will be carried over if the merger occurs.

Janice Shones (Third Street). She is concerned about the lack of excitement which she has heard is typical of white churches. But she is open to different styles of worship.

Ron Zane (First Church). He is against the merger because he believes that black forms of worship are too "fundamentalist" and not very sophisticated. He thinks that free styles of worship which can be seen in the black church are undisciplined.

Judy Matthews (First Church). She dislikes gospel music and is afraid that if merger occurs, she will be forced to play music which she consider to be inferior. She is also worried about her job.

Howard Dotson (First Church). His concern is not whether or not there will be a merger, he tends to support the idea, but he is not sure that he will be able to handle the extra work.

Raymond Ball (Third Street). He is a middle adult (about 35 years of age) who believes that a minister should not spend all of her time in his or her study or calling on members of the congregation. He believes ministers ought to be involved in organizations within the church's community, such as NAACP and Urban League. He supports the merger and wants the community to be served by the congregation.

Mary Clark (Third Street). She has begun a day care center which is sponsored by the church. And she wants to be sure that the project will continue if merger occurs.

Carl Hill (Third Street). His Sunday school class has been talking about issues of integration and living together as children of God. He supports the merger.

Thelma Linsday (First Church). She does not believe that she is a racist, but her attitude toward non-white people shows that she is. She tends to refer to non-whites as "those people", and she doesn't understand why a black congregation can't worship with their own people instead of mixing with a white one.

Michael Olson (First Church). He believes that a merger will help the youth group to grow. The First Church group has dwindled from a weekly average attendance of 20 to a weekly attendance of 5 or 6.

Teri Adkins (Third Street). She supports the merger because she believes in the idea of integrated church, but she also supports the merger because she believes that there are important contacts to be made among members of the First Church congregation.

Harold Kemp (First Church). He is unsure of the merger although he has always thought of himself as a liberal man. He does want whatever will be best for the church.

Diane Graven (First Church). She is totally against the merger because she does not believe that blacks and whites should mix socially or in worship.

Leonard Gray (First Church). He is leaning against the merger, but he has not decided completely. He has two teenage daughters and he is afraid that they might get involved with black boys if the merger occurs.

Alice Merton (Third Street). She is not sure about the merger, but she believes that a bigger building will be helpful to the church.

Bea Fraser (Third Street). She is a vocal member of the board, and she feels threatened by the merger because a new board would have to be elected.

Lois Clark (Third Street). Genuinely cares about Third Street. She does not want it to become so big that it loses its "friendly touch".

Gilbert James (Third Street). He doesn't talk much, but usually has something worthwhile to say when he does. He supports the idea of merger and wants what will be best for the church.

Laura Norton (Third Street). She supports the merger as a way of getting more resources into the church. The facilities could then be improved.

Henry Walker (Third Street). He believes that First Church is not helping the community and should be allowed to die. He resents the idea that Third Street is being called on to "save" a dying congregation.

Ruth Fine (Third Street). She is an elder and believes that before merger can occur, First Church will have to adopt a less casual style of dress.

Theo Hall (Third Street). He has been a churchman for thirty years. He does not like the idea of having women as elders and he is not happy about the prospect of a woman being his pastor or co-pastor.

George Butler (Third Street). His concern is that while women elders are OK, women pastors are not. And if there is one in the new congregation, men will not want to participate in the life of the church.

Sam Maxwell (Third Street). He has been an active churchman all his life. He is enthusiastic about the merger because he believes that the church must be willing to try new things.

Edgar Purvis (Third Street). He has spent most of his college and professional life as the only black or as one of few blacks in a given social situation. His worry is not that merger is bad (he tends to support it), but that Third Street is being used by a white congregation that does not want to admit that it is dying.

Ellen Andrews (First Church). She is worried that First Church is being used by the Third Street congregation. She feels that they would do anything to get a nice physical plant.

David Thornton (First Church). He is in support of the merger because he sees it as a way of getting some new kids into the Sunday school.



The pastors (each player will get a copy of these descriptions).

Rev. Smith - She has been pastor of the First Church for two years. She is energetic and concerned with feminist issues, she tries to include both men and women in the lay work which is done in the church. A good pastor in terms of visiting and nurturing people, she is well liked by the congregation she serves. She is also an able administrator. People have, however, complained that her voice is too high pitched to make her a good preacher and her style of preaching is not very strong. Some feel that she does not give a sense of authority in the pulpit. She supports the merger because she believes that through the church, she can be more active in the community. Rev. Smith believes that the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be preached in segregated congregations.

Rev. Johnson - He has been pastor of the Third Street Church for four years. He does not visit members of the congregation as often as some would like, but his preaching style and personal manner are quite effective. He believes in the merger because he thinks that persons of like-mind about Christ should be able to worship and work together. He has developed an interest in Black Theology. Both Rev. Johnson and Rev. Smith believe that the idea of merger can be a successful one.

LEADER NOTE: The pastors need to be selected before hand. They also need to get together before the game so that they can go over strategies for moderating their groups.

- VI. Both pastors will have been chosen before the game and will have already received this background information on Black Theology and Feminist Theology.

#### BLACK THEOLOGY

"Black theology" began in the late 60's as a religious response to the black power movement. Black theology was and is concerned with presenting the "word about God" (that is "theology") from a perspective which most clearly speaks to the needs of black people. It relies heavily on the Old Testament stories of God rescuing faithful people from conditions of bad treatment or oppression. Black theology especially uses the Exodus story in which God acting through Moses freed the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. Black theology believes that black persons need to be involved in activity which brings about freedom for a black people who continue to live under the oppression of whites.

## FEMINIST THEOLOGY

A feminist is a person (male or female), who believes that men and women ought to be given equal opportunity in terms of employment and education. What feminist theology is concerned with is the way in which women have been discriminated against throughout Christian history. There are several areas of interest for feminist Christians. Here are three

1) language - feminist theology questions whether we should always refer to God as "he", or whether the pronoun "him" should be the only way in which we speak about God. In other words, feminist theology is calling into the question the maleness of God. If God is not really male, but shows qualities of both men and women, then our prayers, songs, and meditations need to reflect all of God's qualities.

2) ordination and placement - for some denominations, women are guaranteed ministerial assignments once they have met the requirements of their particular denominations. Not all women who wish to be ordained have that advantage. Many male church leaders will not discuss the issue of whether or not women should be ordained. Still other women find themselves in denominations which ordain them with little or no difficulty. The women are then confronted with the very real problem of being called to churches at lower compensation than their male colleagues, even though they are as qualified.

3) inclusiveness - the issues dealt with under number 1 and 2 of the background of feminist theology can be placed under the heading of inclusiveness. That is, they ask that women be included into the whole ministry of the church. In terms of language, they ask that we recognize that God need not always be referred to in male terms. Feminist theology also asks that women as well as men be involved in showing the church how it has excluded women from its leadership. By not allowing women to be in leadership positions, the church often does not fully welcome women into the church.

## VII. SCHEDULE FOR THE GAME (game should be played in 2-4 hours. minimum and maximum times will be given for each section)

- A. Total Group Time (8-20 minutes). The leader/organizer of the game will also serve as timekeeper. The leader assumes the role of denominational executive who has come to consult with the two congregations as they deal with the question of merger.  
The purpose of this time together is three-fold:

- 1) to introduce the game
- 2) to give time for reading over thinking about assigned roles (someone needs to be available to hand out name tags, list of roles, description of roles and other material which needs to be handed out)
- 3) to stress that while roles are assigned, the OUTCOME OF THE VOTE IS NOT PRE-DETERMINED. Groups will vote yes or no to the merger or they might develop another alternative.

B. SEPARATE CHURCH CAUCUSES with pastors moderating (15-30 minutes):

First Church and Third Street Church meet with members of their own congregations to discuss how they feel about the proposed merger. The moderating pastors also let their people know that they need to decide on two pro merger speakers and two con merger speakers. Groups should take 5-7 minutes in the group for the pro and con speakers to prepare their presentations.

C. TOTAL GROUP TIME, pastors as co-moderators (20-40 minutes).

Leader calls the groups back together and announces that this is the time for questions, comments, and the raising of caucus issues. The leader will then ask if there are speakers for or against the merger. (Pro and con speakers make speeches-2 minutes maximum--in this order. . .alternate one for and one against

Break. (8-16 minutes) Denominational executive announces that the discussion will recess for a week. During that time participants are to find similarly minded persons from either church. Sub-groups of people who feel the same way about merger may be formed. These sub-groups will determine how they want the vote to go and then they will try to influence others. There may be compromise. Each group picks a leader for the concerns caucus. After a week of discussion and subgroups there will be:

D. CONCERNS CAUCUS (pastors co-lead) (8-16 minutes): concerns may have emerged out of the groups which got together during the week of deliberation. This is the time when those concerns, questions, and proposals are heard. Persons chosen in subgroups will raise the issues.

- E. THE VOTE (denominational executive leads this process; 10-20 minutes: 1) speeches pro/con will be heard; 2) alternative suggestions will be asked for; 3) the vote on whether merger occurs or not will take place.

VIII. DEBRIEF (minimum time for debriefing is 30-60 minutes. Participants should be called out of their roles.)

- A. Note to leader: Debriefing is vital. Treat the 30 minutes minimum seriously.
- B. Chairs need to be put into a new arrangement for the debriefing--or if possible, the participants can go into another room for the debriefing.
- C. Pass out the information on black/feminist theology to the participants and give them 5 minutes to read it.
- D. Questions:
  1. Why did the vote go as it did?
  2. How did it feel playing your particular role? (Here the group leader may want to be more concrete and ask about more concrete roles)
  3. How was it being the only one having your particular role?
  4. How did the way your character felt about blacks and women affect your thinking about the task (the vote)?
  5. How were you personally affected by others assumptions?
  6. How do you participate in stereotyping?
  7. What is the effect of stereotyping of the total church, as well as your own church?
  8. What can we do to get rid of racial and sexual prejudice in the church?

IX. It is important that a RECONCILIATION WORSHIP service be held. The details of the worship can be worked out in a way that is appropriate to people playing the game. The worship should last 20-40 minutes and should include:

- reading II Corinthians 5:18-19
- Communion if appropriate
- open and close with prayer.

Information concerning transitional communities and problems of integrating churches may be obtained by writing to Darwin Wagner and David Harshman at:

ALL NATIONS FOUNDATION  
5443 Ash Street  
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